

Norman Geisler Vs. Steve Gregg: Exchange on Amillennialism and Partial Preterism

The following exchange came about as follows:

Hank Hanegraaff, host of the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast, “came out” as an amillennial, partial-preterist (though not accepting these technical labels) with his book “The Last Disciple,” in 2004. Norman Geisler, Hank’s friend and sometimes guest on the program, being a dispensationalist, objected to Hank’s revealed position, and wrote a response to one of Hank’s books “The Last Disciple”, critiquing Hank’s position. Hank’s organization shared Geisler’s critique with me, at the time. I read it, and put it out of my mind, since its arguments were neither impressive or unusual from the dispensationalist perspective.

Some time later, a correspondent at my online forum asked me to write a point-by-point rebuttal to Geisler’s critique of Hanegraaff. I did so, and posted it on the same forum. Again, I gave the matter no further thought.

About a year later, the same correspondent wrote, asking if I would write another rebuttal – this time to Geisler’s response to me. I had not been aware that Dr. Geisler had even seen my piece, let alone responded to it. I found it online, and wrote my rebuttal, posting it on the same forum. To this day, I don’t know if Dr. Geisler has seen my second response to him. To my knowledge, he did not respond further.

Almost the whole of Dr. Geisler’s statements are pasted into my documents (in boldface type) so that readers may see (whether they read his actual papers or not) his actual words to which I am responding. By contrast, when he responds to my points, he does not quote me, but paraphrases me in a manner that he finds easier to answer than would be possible if he were to cite my actual statements.

To save time reading, the reader may skip directly to the second document (by-passing the original critique of Hank’s book). I have included Geisler’s original critique of Hank’s book, but since the majority of that critique is pasted into my response along with my responses, the material is duplicated in this collection.

Four documents are included here:

- 1) Geisler’s original critique of Hank’s book
- 2) My Response to Geisler’s critique
- 3) Geisler’s critique of my response
- 4) My critique of Geisler’s response to me

A Friendly Response to Hank Hanegraaff’s Book, *The Last Disciple*

by Norman L. Geisler

There are many reasons I am writing this congenial response to Hank’s recent views expressed in *The Last Disciple*. First of all, Hank and I are long time friends and have discussed this topic many times. Second, we both agree that the issue here is not one of orthodoxy vs. unorthodoxy since no great fundamental of the Faith is being denied on either side. We are both fighting in the same

orthodox trench against the same unorthodox enemies of the Faith. Third, I have been a faithful defender of Hank against the many false charges leveled against him and have thereby earned the right to offer some friendly criticism of his view. Fourth, Hank knows I have a strong commitment to the premillennial futurist view opposed in *The Last Disciple*. Indeed, the imminent premillennial view has been a treasured part of Southern Evangelical Seminary's doctrinal statement from the very beginning. As president, I have been asked by numerous constituents whether I agree with Hank's position. In brief, my answer is that we agree on all the essentials of the Faith, but on the question of the last days Hank knows I do not agree with his opposition to the futurist view. Hence, as long-time friends, we just agree to disagree agreeably. It is in this spirit that I offer a friendly response to his book *The Last Disciple* (hereafter "LD") and statements on it taken primarily from the interview (hereafter designated "I") printed on the CRI web site (<http://www.equip.org/about/hank/tyndale.pdf> accessed on 1/20/05). In all fairness, Hank promises a fuller expression of his position in a forthcoming book. But based on what he has written, my comments will be listed after the citations from Hank Hanegraaff's statements.

Introduction

A. LD claims to be "an alternative to the *Left Behind* view of Tim LaHaye" (LD, 393).

Comments: It is that, but it is also much more. It is in fact a strong rejection of the futurist view of the Tribulation as well as premillennialism. And like the preterist view, LD holds that the texts in the Mt. Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25) and in the Book of Revelation refer to Nero and the 1st century (see point "I" below) and not to any future seven year period dominated by the Antichrist and preceding the literal Second Coming of Christ to earth to reign. In short, LD is a critique of the basic futurist view held by Dallas Seminary, Grace Seminary, the Master's Seminary, Southern Evangelical Seminary, Moody Bible Institute, Philadelphia Biblical University, most Bible Colleges in the country, and numerous Christian leaders who support the ministry of CRI. These include Dr. Wayne House, Dr. Ron Rhodes, Dr. J. P. Moreland, Dr. Barry Leventhal, Dr. Thomas Howe, and many of the faculty of the above institutions. In view of this, it is understandable that we offered here a brief response in support of the widely held futurist view.

B. LD claims not to be committed to "any particular model of eschatology" (LD, 393).

Comments: This statement can easily be misinterpreted. Everyone has an eschatology, formal or informal, including the authors of LD. The question is whether or not it is Bible-based, fits all the data consistently, and corresponds to the facts. Further, everyone is committed to their view in varying degrees. The authors of *The Last Disciple* claim to be "deeply committed to a proper method of biblical interpretation" (303). But methodology determines theology. Indeed, they speak of "remarkable evidence" for their view (I, #3) and of "no biblical warrant" for the opposing view (I, #6). They speak also of their interpretation of certain disputed terms which allegedly "demonstrate conclusively" that their view is right (I, #7). Clearly, they are committed to the view which opposes the standard futurist interpretation to which a great number of evangelical scholars, including myself, are firmly committed.

C. LD does not "call into question the orthodoxy of the *Left Behind* authors" (395) and, thereby, the futurist view.

Comment: This is an important point. There is no charge of heresy here on either side, and there should not be (see "F" below). Certainly, the traditional futurist view has a strong basis in the early Church (see "P" below) and the above listed faculty and schools have provided biblical support for it. Indeed, the classic, exhaustive, and seldom read three volume set of George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, offers biblical support for the imminent premillennial view. The common orthodox belief of all premillennial and amillennial views is a literal return of Christ and a physical resurrection of the dead. On this part of the future, there is basic agreement.

D. The authors of LD wish to “demonstrate the dangers inherent in the interpretive method . . . dispensationalists employ” (LD, 395).

Comments: We agree that the method of interpretation is crucial to one’s conclusions on last things. We also agree that the literal (historical-grammatical) method of interpretation is the correct one. We do not agree, however, as to who is more consistent in their use of this method. Dispensationalists see an inconsistency in the anti-futurist method since many predictions in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18 were not fulfilled in A.D. 70 – at least not literally. For example, the stars did not fall from heaven (Mt. 24:29), nor were one-third of humans killed (Rev. 9:18), and neither did all the creatures in the sea die (Rev. 16:3) in A.D. 70.

E. LD opposes “Placing the Beast [of Rev. 13] in the twenty-first instead of the first century” (LD, 395).

Comments: Although LD disavows the label of “partial preterism” as well as “post-millennialism,” this conclusion is in agreement with preterism. And if LD is right, then the rest of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18) must be placed there too. But if it is taken literally, then it cannot be placed there since Jesus did not visibly return to earth in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24:30 cf. Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:10-11). Nor did Christ literally execute all the judgments listed in Revelation 9 and 16 at that time. And since LD claims to hold a literal method of interpretation, then its consistency can be seriously challenged at this point.

F. LD affirms that “John was told not to seal up the prophecy because its fulfillment was [in the] fore future,” not in the “far future” as Daniel was told his was (Dan. 8:26; 12:4) (LD, 395).

Comments: Here again, this agrees with the partial preterist view that John is speaking about the first century, whatever applications it may have to later generations. But if Revelation 6-18 refers to the first century, then why not the whole book since John was told, according to LD, that all of Revelation was to be unveiled for the near future? And if this refers to the first century, then one is driven to full preterism which both sides admit is a heresy since it says the resurrection is past (2 Tim. 2:18). There is no consistent hermeneutical way to separate Rev. 19-22 from 6-18 on preterist grounds. Indeed, the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15) which is during the Tribulation announces the coming of Christ. And the verses speaking of a “soon” coming, as LD interprets them, refer to the whole book of Revelation from beginning to end (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:10).

G. LD asserts that “John’s repeated use of such words and phrases *assoon* and *the time is near* demonstrate conclusively that John could not have had the twenty-first century in mind” (LD, 395; I, #3).

Comments: If so, then on this premise the whole book of Revelation (including the Second Coming and Resurrection – Chapters 19-20) must refer to the first century since the word “soon” applies to the whole book of Revelation (1:1; 22:10). In this case, full preterism follows which is heretical. So, while the conclusions of LD are not unorthodox, if this understanding is applied consistently to other texts, then the logical implications will lead to unorthodox conclusions. Hence, while **doctrinally** this is an intramural orthodox discussion, nevertheless, **methodologically** this is a very important issue.

Further, these words do not refer to a **soon** event but a **swift** event. This is borne out by the Greek lexicons and dictionaries. The Greek word for “quickly” is *tachu* which occurs thirteen times in the New Testament (Mt. 5:25; 28:7, 8; Mk. 9:39; 16:8; Jn. 11:29; Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). Arndt and Gingrich (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 814) say it means “quick, swift, speedy.” It is what happens “quickly, at a rapid rate.” Thayer (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 616) agrees, saying, it means “quickly, speedily.” Likewise, Vine (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 913) concurs that it means “swift, quick . . . , quickly.” Hence, this term need not, as LD argues, refer to a first-century event but to the imminent coming of Christ whenever it occurs.

H. The LD view affirms that “Unlike the *Left Behind* authors, we believe that when John in Revelation says ten or more times that the events about which he is writing ‘must soon take place,’ or for which ‘the time is near,’ that is precisely what he means” (I, #4).

Comments: First, if this is precisely what he means in the whole book, then, as already noted, the heretical view of full preterism follows. Second, these may be interpreted, as the futurist holds, as indicating the imminence of Christ’s coming, namely, that it may happen at any time (see 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28). The great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson said that by “quickly” in Revelation “I am coming (imminent) . . . is meant to be understood.” He adds, “we do not know how soon ‘quickly’ is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6.306). Noted New Testament scholar Leon Morris commented: “The imminence of the coming is repeated” (Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 258). In his classic commentary on Revelation, J. A. Seiss affirmed: “Everywhere the promised Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is represented as close at hand, **liable to occur at any moment**” (Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 523, emphasis added). The word translated “shortly”(Rev. 1:1; 22:6) is *tachei* which is from the same root as *tachu* (see above) and, like it, means swiftly or speedily. As such it does not necessarily refer to a **soon** but a **sudden** event. Further, as hermeneutical expert, Dr. Thomas Howe, has pointed out, John was not told to “unseal the revelation he received.” Rather, he was told, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” This does not mean the prophecy was fulfilled in John’s day but that *the words* of the prophecy could be understood by those who read them in his day.

The word “near” (Rev. 1:3) is the Greek word *eggus* which means “near” or “at hand.” But this is a relative term like “short” and “long,” of which one can ask how near? And as measured by whom? What is long to us is short for God. Peter said, “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Pet. 3:8). Further, there are clear biblical examples where a “short” time was really a long time for us. Hebrews 10:37 says Jesus would come in just “a little while” and it is nearly 2000 years since then, and He has not come yet. Haggai 2:6-7 says the time from his day (c. 500 B.C.) to the glorious temple to be rebuilt at Christ’s coming was only a “little while.” Even to Christ’s first coming this was 500 years, and the prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until His second coming which is over 2500 years already.

I. LD contends that “The Great Tribulation instigated by Nero is the antitype for every type and tribulation that follows before we experience the reality of our own resurrection at the Second Coming” (LD, 395).

Comments: It is understandable how a literal first century Tribulation could be an encouragement to later sufferers, but where in Scripture does it say it is an antitype for all future tribulations? Further, if LD takes this to refer to Nero and the first century, as it says repeatedly, then that is the meaning of the text. And that is what partial preterism means. So, in spite of any disavowal of the term, this is an anti-futurist view of these texts common to preterism.

J. “*The Last Disciple* series places the Great Tribulation precisely where it belongs, in a first-century milieu in which ‘the last disciple’ comforts believers in the throes of the mother of all persecutions” (LD, 395).

Comments: If the “Great Tribulation” meant by John in Revelation was “precisely” a first century event, then this is indistinguishable from preterism, no matter how many later applications are made of the text for future sufferers. If this is so, then there is no future “Great Tribulation” as futurists claim and the LD view is a form of preterism, despite any protests by LD authors to the contrary.

K. “*The Last Disciple*, then, will develop the necessary skills for reading Scripture – particularly the book of Revelation-for all its worth” (I, # 1).

Comments: In all candor, this is a bit of an over claim. I wish it were that simple, and given that the method used in LD deviates from the literal interpretation of many events in Revelation mentioned above, I don't think the book accomplishes this goal. This is so especially in view of the fact that the authors admit the Old Testament background for the language and images of these New testament predictions. But if Revelation is patterned after the deliverance of His people through tribulation in the Old Testament, then why reject the view that the plagues of Revelation are as literal as those executed on Pharaoh in the Exodus after which Revelation is modeled? Further, if other parts of the prophecy Jesus gave in Matthew 24-25 are taken literally by LD and fulfilled literally, then how can it consistently deny a literal fulfillment of the others in the same text?

L. "There is also remarkable evidence for Nero as the Beast and his persecutions as the great tribulation" (I, #3).

Comments: Actually, the opposite is true. There is strong evidence that Revelation was written in the 90s well after Nero was dead during Domitian's reign. If so, this would make the LD false. Briefly stated the evidence for dating Revelation in the 90s A.D. is as follows: First, this futurist view of the Tribulation, Antichrist, and/or even Millennium was held by many of the earliest Fathers including Irenaeus (2nd century) who said "It was seen not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian" (*Against Heresies* 5.30.3). This was confirmed by Victorinus (3rd century) who wrote: "When John said these things, he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Caesar Domitian" (*Commentary of Revelation* 10:11). Likewise, Eusebius (4th century) confirmed the Domitian date (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.18). Second, other early Fathers after A.D. 70 refer to the Tribulation or Antichrist spoken of in Revelation as yet future (see Commodianus [3rd century], *Instructions* 44, and Ephraem of Syria [4th century], *On the Last Times*, 2). Third, the conditions of the seven churches (Rev. 2-3) fit this later period rather than that reflected in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Timothy which were written in the 60s. For example, the church at Ephesus in Revelation had lost its first love (Rev. 2:4) and others like Laodicea (Rev. 3:14f.) had fallen from the Faith. Fourth, it was not until the reign of Domitian that emperor worship as reflected in Revelation was instituted. Fifth, Laodicea appears as a prosperous city in Revelation 3:17, yet it was destroyed by an earthquake in c. A.D. 61, during Nero's reign, and would not have recovered so quickly in a couple of years. Sixth, John's exile on the island of Patmos implies a later date when persecution was more rampant (1:9). Seventh, the references to persecution and Martyrdom in the churches reflect a later date (cf. Rev. 2:10, 13 cf.). Eighth, Polycarp's reference to the church at Smyrna (*to the Philippians* 11.3) reveals that it did not exist in Paul's day (by A.D. 64) as it did when John wrote Revelation 2:8. Ninth, the Nicolaitans (of Rev. 2:6, 11) were not firmly established until nearer the end of the century. Tenth, there is not sufficient time on the early date for John's arrival in Asia (late 60s) and replacement of Paul as the respected leader of the Asian Church (see discussion in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, vol. 2, chapter 7).

M. LD objects to "The pretribulation rapture model featured in the *Left Behind* series [that] interprets Revelation 13, for example, in a strictly literal fashion" (I, #3).

Comments: It all depends on what is meant by "strictly literal." If "strictly literal" means the unique interpretation of Tim LaHaye that the Antichrist resurrects himself, then we agree with LD that this is wrong. However, we must be careful not to paint all futurists with the same broad brush. There are a lot of them who do not agree with LaHaye here, including the commentary produced by the Dallas Seminary faculty (see Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 960). And it would not be fair to leave the impression that LaHaye's interpretation of Revelation 13 is essential to, or even characteristic of, the futurist view of Revelation. After all, if we take the text literally, it does not say the Beast was "resurrected" from the dead. It says that his deadly "wound" was "healed" (Rev. 13:12).

N. LD affirms that “As the characters in the novel deal with tribulation, they are sustained by the hope of resurrection that Jesus gives all of us, not with a belief that they are meant to be taken away from trouble by a rapture” (I, #4 cf. I, #5).

Comments: This is a false either/or when it is a both/and situation. The resurrection and the rapture take place at the same time, whenever that time is (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Even those who are raptured will receive their permanent glorified body at that time (1 Cor. 15:50-56). Of course, they are distinct events in the sense that the dead are raised “first” and those alive are “caught up” with them to “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). But these events happen at the same time, and they both receive their permanent immortal, imperishable body at that moment (1 Cor. 15:50-56). So, the two hopes cannot be separated.

O. LD declares that “Prior to the nineteenth century all Christians-including all premillennialists-believed the rapture or the resurrection of believers and the second coming of Christ were simultaneous events and not two distinct happenings separated by at least seven years” (I, #6).

Comments: This is plainly and simply false. The early Ephraem manuscript (see Thomas Ice, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 110-111) reveals the pretrib view was held as early as the 300s A.D. And even if the first known reference is later, truth is not determined by time. This is the fallacy of “Chronological Snobbery.” The amillennial view itself (with which this point in LD accords) is “late” since most of the early Fathers were premillennial including Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and the early Augustine. Other futurists (whose view is opposed by LD) include even earlier subapostolic writings like Irenaeus, Ignatius, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, Papias, Clement of Rome, Lactantius, Methodius, Epiphanius, and others (see George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1, pp. 304, 324, 451).

P. “First, there is not a single passage in Scripture that teaches a pretribulational rapture” (I, #6).

Comment: In one sense this is true, but it is very misleading. For in the strict sense, there is not a single passage of Scripture that teaches the Trinity either, but that does not mean it is not biblically based. And in this broader sense of biblically based, which must be allowed for the doctrines of the Trinity and inerrancy, the pretrib view is biblical as well (see Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Comes*). For in the broader sense, these doctrines are not based on a single text but on all the data of Scripture on the topic put in a consistent systematic whole that best explains them with whatever varying degree of certitude (see Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, chap. 12).

Q. “There is no biblical warrant for LaHaye’s hypothesis that believers will be resurrected some one thousand seven years before the resurrection of unbelievers” (I, #6).

Comments: If this means there is no biblical warrant for believing in the pretrib view, then one must beg to disagree. Detailed reasons are listed in the forthcoming volume four of our *Systematic Theology: The Church and Last Things* (chapter 17). Or, if this means there is no biblical basis for believing there are two resurrections, one before and one after “the thousand years,” then one must strongly disagree. Even non-dispensationalists, like George Ladd, agree that a literal (historical-grammatical) interpretation of Revelation 20 demands a premillennial conclusion of a first physical resurrection before the thousand years and a second physical resurrection after it (see Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*). Just the phrase, “and the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:5) makes this view clear. The alternative interpretations must spiritualize (allegorize) this text. Indeed, to deny the premillennial view one must take the first resurrection as spiritual and the second one as literal. Ironically, only the first one is actually called a “resurrection” (Rev. 20:5-6), though “live again”(Gk. *ezasan*) is used of both (vv. 4-5). Nowhere in Scripture is the word “resurrection” ever used in a spiritual sense. So, to spiritualize the “first resurrection” is a gross violation of the literal (historical-grammatical) method of interpretation.

R. “The plain and proper reading of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm” (I, #7).

Comments: We agree. But if this is so, then the plain and proper reading of Revelation 20 will yield a futurist premillennial view contrary to LD. Yet LD opposes this futurist view in favor of a kind of amillennial view. ⁽¹⁾ This conclusion is inconsistent with its alleged literal method of interpreting the Bible.

Conclusion

The basic goals of LD are admirable, and its basic doctrines are within orthodoxy. Nonetheless, the dialogue on methodology is important since orthodoxy is dependant on a proper literal (historical-grammatical) interpretation of the Bible. However, LD does not appear to measure up to the standards of its own alleged literal method. In rejecting a futurist ⁽²⁾interpretation of Revelation, LD must reject a literal interpretation of many passages in Revelation and in Matthew 24-25 which they claim were fulfilled in the first century. And if this same non-literal method were applied to other passages like the Gospels, then it would undermine historical Christianity. Hence, the issue is of great importance. So, on this matter we must respectfully disagree agreeably with our good friend Hank Hanegraaff.

Yet I would suggest a more excellent way. LD rightly criticizes excesses in some futurists' interpretation of some texts. But the same could be done for preterists' interpretations which claim these predictions were fulfilled in A.D. 70. Would it not be better for LD to be content to show the inconsistencies of some futurists' interpretations, rather than attacking the whole premillennial futurist scheme which is firmly rooted in the historical-grammatical interpretation of all of Scripture, including prophecy, and amply exhibited in the majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity? For when the literal method is applied to the unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, it yields a futurist interpretation of Scripture which affirms that Christ will not only physically return to earth but He will also establish a literal kingdom (Mt. 19:28) and reign for a literal thousand years (Rev. 20), restoring the literal Land of Promise to the literal descendants of Abraham from Iraq to Syria to Lebanon, the territory of the Palestinians, and all the way to Egypt (Gen. 13:15-17; 15:7-21) "forever" (Gen 13:15). Likewise, the literal method of interpretation demands that there will be a literal throne of David on which the Messiah will actually reign on a throne in Jerusalem over the restored literal descendants of Abraham "forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-16). But these unconditional promises have never been fulfilled, even though God made them with an "immutable" oath (Heb. 6:17-18 cf. Ps. 89:20-37). However, if the Bible is to be taken literally, then the basic premillennial futurist view which LD critiques must be right. Indeed, if LD wished to take all of Scripture literally and consistently, then it would be better to affirm these unconditional promises which are at the heart of the premillennial futurist view, rather than occupy its time with criticizing excesses in some popular presentations of these views.

Notes

1. In personal conversation with Hank, he disavows both the premillennial and the postmillennial views by name, which in terms of the three basic views leaves him in the amillennial camp, though he is reluctant to use this word for his view.
2. Of course even partial preterists are "futurists" regarding the Second Coming and Resurrection. But they reject the futurist understanding of the bulk of Book of Revelation.

Response to Norman Geisler's Critique of Hank Hanegraaff's "The Last Disciple"

By Steve Gregg

Geisler's piece is here posted in boldface type. My comments are in brackets. –Steve

LD claims not to be committed to "any particular model of eschatology" (LD, 393).

Comments: This statement can easily be misinterpreted. Everyone has an eschatology, formal or informal, including the authors of LD. The question is whether or not it is Bible-based, fits all the data consistently, and corresponds to the facts. Further, everyone is committed to their view in varying degrees. The authors of *The Last Disciple* claim to be "deeply committed to a proper method of biblical interpretation" (303). But methodology determines theology. Indeed, they speak of "remarkable evidence" for their view (I, #3) and of "no biblical warrant" for the opposing view (I, #6). They speak also of their interpretation of certain disputed terms which allegedly "demonstrate conclusively" that their view is right (I, #7). Clearly, they are committed to the view which opposes the standard futurist interpretation to which a great number of evangelical scholars, including myself, are firmly committed.

[I have to agree with Geisler on this point. I have spoken to Hank about this very thing. He does not accept any label for his eschatological position (probably because, as soon as he has a label, those of other positions may distance themselves and their support from him). I can understand his not wanting to alienate listeners on such a relatively unimportant subject as eschatology, but it would be more helpful for him to say that he does not wish to discuss eschatology than to say that there is no name for the views he holds, when there actually is a name for it. Hank's eschatology appears to be amillennial (like mine), and his approach to Revelation (like mine) is partial-preterist, though he does not admit this label. He calls his view (about which he is ready to publish a new book) "exegetical eschatology." However, this label does not in itself reveal anything about the specific content of his eschatological ideas.]

C. LD does not "call into question the orthodoxy of the Left Behind authors"(395) and, thereby, the futurist view.

Comment: This is an important point. There is no charge of heresy here on either side, and there should not be (see "F" below). Certainly, the traditional futurist view has a strong basis in the early Church (see "P" below) and the above listed faculty and schools have provided biblical support for it. Indeed, the classic, exhaustive, and seldom read three volume set of George Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, offers biblical support for the imminent premillennial view. The common orthodox belief of all premillennial and amillennial views is a literal return of Christ and a physical resurrection of the dead. On this part of the future, there is basic agreement.

D. The authors of LD wish to "demonstrate the dangers inherent in the interpretive method . . . dispensationalists employ" (LD, 395).

Comments: We agree that the method of interpretation is crucial to one's conclusions on last things. We also agree that the literal (historical-grammatical) method of interpretation is the correct one. We do not agree, however, as to who is more consistent in their use of this method. Dispensationalists see an inconsistency in the anti-futurist method since many predictions in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18 were not fulfilled in A.D. 70 - at least not literally. For example, the stars did not fall from heaven (Mt. 24:29), nor were one-third of

humans killed (Rev. 9:18), and neither did all the creatures in the sea die (Rev. 16:3) in A.D. 70.

[Geisler makes the mistake (commonly made by dispensationalists) of assuming that the "historical-grammatical" method of interpretation means the same thing as the "literal" interpretation. The former methodology attempts to draw from a passage the meaning that would have been understood by the original readers in their historical situation, understanding their own language. This by no means would necessitate a "literal" interpretation--especially if a work appeared in a genre which the original readers immediately recognized as symbolic--as would be so in the case of Revelation.

Although the Olivet Discourse is often given as an example of apocalyptic prophecy, only a few verses actually reflect this style. Most of Matthew 24 can be taken quite literally and applied to AD 70. The apocalyptic verses (vv.27-31) would be understood (like all apocalyptic literature) as symbolic. The rest of Matthew 24, and all of Matthew 25, are occupied with ordinary parables (yet another genre which can not be taken "literally").

The recognition of the genre of a piece of literature is the first step toward grasping the meaning that the original readers would have drawn from it. This is what dispensationalists consistently fail to acknowledge. They think that loyalty to the historical-grammatical method requires taking everything literally, though (ironically) they do not take everything literally any more than do others.]

E. LD opposes "Placing the Beast [of Rev. 13] in the twenty-first instead of the first century" (LD, 395).

Comments: Although LD disavows the label of "partial preterism" as well as "post-millennialism," this conclusion is in agreement with preterism. And if LD is right, then the rest of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18) must be placed there too. But if it is taken literally, then it cannot be placed there since Jesus did not visibly return to earth in A.D. 70 (Mt. 24:30 cf. Rev. 1:7 and Acts 1:10-11). Nor did Christ literally execute all the judgments listed in Revelation 9 and 16 at that time. And since LD claims to hold a literal method of interpretation, then its consistency can be seriously challenged at this point.

[Again, Geisler is right. Hank's view is indeed that of a partial preterist, and (I think) Hank gets himself into trouble by claiming to adhere to the "literal" method of interpretation, when there is no need to make such a claim. The average, unreflective, modern Christian assumes that the literal interpretation of all scripture is invariably the most faithful interpretation, and Hank, apparently, does not wish to get into trouble with such people by admitting that he does not, in fact, take everything in the Bible literally. Instead of claiming to follow the literal interpretation, I think he would have fewer woes given to him by critics if he would instead say, "Of course I don't woodenly adhere to some arbitrary rule of consistent literalism! How could the imposition of such a silly and unwarranted rule not prejudice the results of the inquiry? I much prefer to take a responsible approach, allowing the material to speak to me as it most likely would have been understood by the original readers--whether that turns out to be literal or figurative."]

F. LD affirms that "John was told not to seal up the prophecy because its fulfillment was [in the] fore future," not in the "far future" as Daniel was told his was (Dan. 8:26; 12:4) (LD, 395).

Comments: Here again, this agrees with the partial preterist view that John is speaking about the first century, whatever applications it may have to later generations. But if Revelation 6-18 refers to the first century, then why not the whole book since John was told, according to LD, that all of Revelation was to be unveiled for the near future? And if this refers to the first

century, then one is driven to full preterism which both sides admit is a heresy since it says the resurrection is past (2 Tim. 2:18). There is no consistent hermeneutical way to separate Rev. 19-22 from 6-18 on preterist grounds. Indeed, the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15) which is during the Tribulation announces the coming of Christ. And the verses speaking of a "soon" coming, as LD interprets them, refer to the whole book of Revelation from beginning to end (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:10).

[So says Geisler. But he demonstrates a limited awareness of the exegetical options.

There are some who believe that the entire book of Revelation was fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem, but who are not "full preterists." The latter do not believe that there are any predictions in the Bible that look beyond AD 70; the former would only say that there are no prophecies in the Book of Revelation that look beyond AD 70. There is nothing in one's seeing all of Revelation as fulfilled in the first century that would preclude the same interpreter seeing the future second coming, the resurrection and judgment in other parts of scripture (e.g. John 5:28-29; 6: 39, 40, 44, 54/1 Thess.4:14-18/ 1 Cor.15).]

I personally do not see all of Revelation fulfilled in AD 70, and I believe there are sections that look to the future coming of Christ. This is not as inconsistent as Geisler imagines, however, and is based on contextual and exegetical considerations in each passage. Nor does the prediction of a near fulfillment of the prophecies in the book necessarily have to apply to every prediction of the book. If a book was, say, 90% concerned with near events, and 10% occupied with distant events, one might justly say that the book should be heeded by the present generation because of the nearness of the fulfillment of its predictions (that is, the vast majority of them).]

G. LD asserts that "John's repeated use of such words and phrases as soon and the time is near demonstrate conclusively that John could not have had the twenty-first century in mind" (LD, 395; I, #3).

Comments: If so, then on this premise the whole book of Revelation (including the Second Coming and Resurrection - Chapters 19-20) must refer to the first century since the word "soon" applies to the whole book of Revelation (1:1; 22:10). In this case, full preterism follows which is heretical. So, while the conclusions of LD are not unorthodox, if this understanding is applied consistently to other texts, then the logical implications will lead to unorthodox conclusions. Hence, while doctrinally this is an intramural orthodox discussion, nevertheless, methodologically this is a very important issue.

[The assertion that these time limiting verses must necessarily apply to the whole book of Revelation is by no means obvious or indisputable. Also, Geisler is wrong again in asserting that applying the whole prophecy of Revelation necessarily leads to "full preterism" or any other heresy. This paragraph, then, is simply not factually correct.]

Further, these words do not refer to a soon event but a swift event. This is borne out by the Greek lexicons and dictionaries. The Greek word for "quickly" is tachy which occurs thirteen times in the New Testament (Mt. 5:25; 28:7, 8; Mk. 9:39; 16:8; Jn. 11:29; Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). Arndt and Gingrich (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 814) say it means "quick, swift, speedy." It is what happens "quickly, at a rapid rate." Thayer (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 616) agrees, saying, it means "quickly, speedily." Likewise, Vine (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 913) concurs that it means "swift, quick . . . , quickly." Hence, this term need not, as LD argues, refer to a first-century event but to the imminent coming of Christ whenever it occurs.

[If *tachu* were the only word that was used in Revelation to suggest immediate fulfillment, then this point would put futurism and preterism upon exactly equal footing, since rapidity could be said to describe events either of the past or of the future. However, in Revelation, this word is only found in 2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20. These have never been the primary verses that I would use to prove that the readers were to expect a soon fulfillment. I would appeal to 1:1 --"which must shortly take place;" 1:3--"The time is near;" 1:19 (in the Greek)--"The things which are about to take place after these things;" and 22:10--"the time is at hand." These verses use a variety of Greek words other than *tachu*, and all convey the idea of a near-future fulfillment.]

H. The LD view affirms that "Unlike the Left Behind authors, we believe that when John in Revelation says ten or more times that the events about which he is writing 'must soon take place,' or for which 'the time is near,' that is precisely what he means" (I, #4).

Comments: First, if this is precisely what he means in the whole book, then, as already noted, the heretical view of full preterism follows. Second, these may be interpreted, as the futurist holds, as indicating the imminence of Christ's coming, namely, that it may happen at any time (see 1 Cor. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28). The great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson said that by "quickly" in Revelation "I am coming (imminent) . . . is meant to be understood." He adds, "we do not know how soon 'quickly' is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6.306). Noted New Testament scholar Leon Morris commented: "The imminence of the coming is repeated" (Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 258). In his classic commentary on Revelation, J. A. Seiss affirmed: "Everywhere the promised Apocalypse of the Lord Jesus is represented as close at hand, liable to occur at any moment" (Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 523, emphasis added). The word translated "shortly"(Rev. 1:1; 22:6) is *tachei* which is from the same root as *tachu* (see above) and, like it, means swiftly or speedily. As such it does not necessarily refer to a soon but a sudden event. Further, as hermeneutical expert, Dr. Thomas Howe, has pointed out, John was not told to "unseal the revelation he received." Rather, he was told, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near." This does not mean the prophecy was fulfilled in John's day but that the words of the prophecy could be understood by those who read them in his day.

[It is not surprising that scholars who do not acknowledge the historical fulfillment of Revelation, and who look for fulfillment in the future, would come up with the idea that these Greek words might possibly only be affirming that the prophecies could be fulfilled at any time--even thousands of years removed from the statements, but I find it unconvincing. Though scholars may find this meaning possible, it is another question whether the original readers would have naturally understood the words in this awkward and vague way.

The command not to seal the words of the prophecy (22:10) are an unmistakable contrast to Daniel's being told to seal up the words of his prophecy (Dan.12:4, 9). Daniel was told to seal it because the fulfillment was distant from his day; John is told NOT to seal his book, because (as he is plainly told) the fulfillment was not distant at all.]

The word "near" (Rev. 1:3) is the Greek word *eggus* which means "near" or "at hand." But this is a relative term like "short" and "long," of which one can ask how near? And as measured by whom? What is long to us is short for God. Peter said, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Further, there are clear biblical examples where a "short" time was really a long time for us. Hebrews 10:37 says Jesus would come in just "a little while" and it is nearly 2000 years since then, and He has not come yet. Haggai 2:6-7 says the time from his day (c. 500 B.C.) to the glorious temple to be rebuilt at Christ's coming was only a "little while." Even to Christ's first coming this was

500 years, and the prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until His second coming which is over 2500 years already.

[To say that a thing is "near" is certainly a relative term. When Haggai predicted that Jesus would come to the temple (2:6-7), that coming was actually about 500 years off. Compared to the whole history of the Old Covenant (1500 years) an event occurring in the last third of that period might be considered "relatively near." Hebrews 10:37, in my opinion, is about AD 70, not the second coming. That event was truly near at the time of the writing of Hebrews. But let us suppose the events predicted in Revelation were actually 2000 years removed from the original readers' time. Would this seem "relatively near?" Relative to what?

To say that it was "near" from God's perspective (to whom "a thousand years is like a day") is to say that the words mean absolutely nothing at all, since an event a million years away might be said to be "near" from God's point of view! It would have been far less misleading if God had just said nothing at all about the time of fulfillment, rather than giving His suffering people the impression that this was a message of soon vindication. While Geisler's point is barely admissible, it makes God out to be quite the tease!]

I. LD contends that "The Great Tribulation instigated by Nero is the antitype for every type and tribulation that follows before we experience the reality of our own resurrection at the Second Coming" (LD, 395).

Comments: It is understandable how a literal first century Tribulation could be an encouragement to later sufferers, but where in Scripture does it say it is an antitype for all future tribulations? Further, if LD takes this to refer to Nero and the first century, as it says repeatedly, then that is the meaning of the text. And that is what partial preterism means. So, in spite of any disavowal of the term, this is an anti-futurist view of these texts common to preterism.

[True enough.]

J. "The Last Disciple series places the Great Tribulation precisely where it belongs, in a first-century milieu in which 'the last disciple' comforts believers in the throes of the mother of all persecutions" (LD, 395).

Comments: If the "Great Tribulation" meant by John in Revelation was "precisely" a first century event, then this is indistinguishable from preterism, no matter how many later applications are made of the text for future sufferers. If this is so, then there is no future "Great Tribulation" as futurists claim and the LD view is a form of preterism, despite any protests by LD authors to the contrary.

[I personally do not equate the "great tribulation" (Matt.24:21) with the Neronean persecutions, but rather with the troubles that befell the Jews beginning with the Jewish war, in 66 AD. Matthew's words, "great tribulation," are paralleled in Luke by the words "distress in the land" [i.e., of Israel], and "wrath upon this people" [the Jews]" (Luke 21:23). Thus the "tribulation" predicted is upon Judean Israel, not the Roman Christians.]

K. "The Last Disciple, then, will develop the necessary skills for reading Scripture - particularly the book of Revelation-for all its worth" (I, # 1).

Comments: In all candor, this is a bit of an over claim. I wish it were that simple, and given that the method used in LD deviates from the literal interpretation of many events in Revelation mentioned above, I don't think the book accomplishes this goal. This is so

especially in view of the fact that the authors admit the Old Testament background for the language and images of these New testament predictions. But if Revelation is patterned after the deliverance of His people through tribulation in the Old Testament, then why reject the view that the plagues of Revelation are as literal as those executed on Pharaoh in the Exodus after which Revelation is modeled? Further, if other parts of the prophecy Jesus gave in Matthew 24-25 are taken literally by LD and fulfilled literally, then how can it consistently deny a literal fulfillment of the others in the same text?

[The reason one can take the plagues of Egypt literally and those in Revelation figuratively is that these are two very different kinds of literature. Exodus is a historical narrative, whereas Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy. The former genre is expected to use literal language to describe historical events; the latter uses symbolism, which echo significant historical events (like the plagues of Egypt) in order to get across its message.

As for the question of how one can be consistent in taking part of the Olivet Discourse literally, and part non-literally, I think I addressed that above: part of the discourse is literal language, part is apocalyptic language, and part is parabolic. Each of these genres call for a different hermeneutic, but it is not really confusing, but actually more or less intuitive, once the separate genres are identified.]

L. "There is also remarkable evidence for Nero as the Beast and his persecutions as the great tribulation" (I, #3).

Comments: Actually, the opposite is true. There is strong evidence that Revelation was written in the 90s well after Nero was dead during Domitian's reign. If so, this would make the LD false. Briefly stated the evidence for dating Revelation in the 90s A.D. is as follows: First, this futurist view of the Tribulation, Antichrist, and/or even Millennium was held by many of the earliest Fathers including Irenaeus (2nd century) who said "It was seen not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian" (Against Heresies 5.30.3). This was confirmed by Victorinus (3rd century) who wrote: "When John said these things, he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Caesar Domitian" (Commentary of Revelation 10:11). Likewise, Eusebius (4th century) confirmed the Domitian date (Ecclesiastical History 3.18).

[There is very good reason to believe that both Victorinus and Eusebius (the latter did not even believe in the canonicity of Revelation) were dependent upon the quote from Irenaeus for their information, and that we therefore have this entire testimony rooted in the statement of one man. Any good preterist commentary will deal with this statement by Irenaeus (mine has a section dealing with it and with most of Geisler's arguments in this paragraph). For a detailed response to this argument, see Kenneth Gentry's, Before Jerusalem Fell, or the introduction to my book, Revelation: Four Views.]

Second, other early Fathers after A.D. 70 refer to the Tribulation or Antichrist spoken of in Revelation as yet future (see Commondianus [3rd century], Instructions 44, and Ephraem of Syria [4th century], On the Last Times, 2).

[I would have no interest in denying this historical fact. What Christians believed in the third and fourth centuries, however, does not carry as much weight in my reckoning as what the scriptures actually say.]

Third, the conditions of the seven churches (Rev. 2-3) fit this later period rather than that reflected in Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Timothy which were written in the 60s. For

example, the church at Ephesus in Revelation had lost its first love (Rev. 2:4) and others like Laodicea (Rev. 3:14f.) had fallen from the Faith.

[How long does it take for a church to go wrong? Paul wrote to Timothy no later than AD 67. Could not a church cool in its ardor under persecution, or even become lukewarm, under a year or two of persecution? The Galatian churches apostasized within months of their founding, even without persecution (see Galatians 1:6-7/ 5:4).]

Fourth, it was not until the reign of Domitian that emperor worship as reflected in Revelation was instituted.

[There is nothing in Revelation that tells us that emperor worship was being enforced at the time of writing. The worship of the Beast may or may not refer to the worship of the Roman emperors as gods. It may simply refer to the veneration of the state and the attributing to the state god-like power or dignity. In any case, even if emperor worship is in view, John does not tell us that it was happening at the time of writing. Revelation is a prophecy of "the things that are about to take place"(1:19 Gr). It is a low view of prophecy that suggests that the prophet cannot discuss future developments before they arise.]

Fifth, Laodicea appears as a prosperous city in Revelation 3:17, yet it was destroyed by an earthquake in c. A.D. 61, during Nero's reign, and would not have recovered so quickly in a couple of years.

[How do we know that it could not have recovered so quickly? And how do we know that, at the time of writing, Laodicea had fully recovered from the earthquake? This argument professes to know too much.]

Sixth, John's exile on the island of Patmos implies a later date when persecution was more rampant (1:9).

[This is not self-evident. The apostles James, Peter and Paul had succumbed to persecution and martyrdom before AD 70. Why could not such persecution have reach John also at that early date?]

Seventh, the references to persecution and Martyrdom in the churches reflect a later date (cf. Rev. 2:10, 13 cf.).

[This is as subjective as the previous point. Churches were persecuted as early as the martyrdom of Stephen (32 AD?), and were persecuted in the lifetimes of Paul (1 Thess.2:14; 3:4) and Peter (1 Peter 1:7; 4:12ff). Both of these apostles died during the reign of Nero, so we know that persecution of churches existed long before AD 70.]

Eighth, Polycarp's reference to the church at Smyrna (to the Philippians 11.3) reveals that it did not exist in Paul's day (by A.D. 64) as it did when John wrote Revelation 2:8.

[This is not true. Gentry's book (Before Jerusalem Fell) and my own book (Revelation: Four Views) both deal with this fallacious claim. What Polycarp wrote was simply that the Smyrnians did not know the Lord at the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. This letter could have been written anytime after AD 60. Why could not the church in Smyrna have come into existence between, say, 62 and 68 AD? This would agree with Polycarp's statement, and still allow the church of Smyrna to have existed before AD 69. There is no problem at all here for the early date preterist.]

Ninth, the Nicolaitans (of Rev. 2:6, 11) were not firmly established until nearer the end of the century.

[There is no mention in Revelation of Nicolaitanism being "firmly established" at the time of writing. We are only told that there were "some" who held the doctrines and "some" who practiced the deeds of the Nicolaitans. There is no indication of how widespread the heresy was at the time. Besides, no one knows how early this heresy arose. The church fathers traced the doctrine of the Nicolaitans to Nicolas, the deacon (Acts 6:5), who became a Gnostic heretic, and may well have had a significant number of followers well before AD 70.]

Tenth, there is not sufficient time on the early date for John's arrival in Asia (late 60s) and replacement of Paul as the respected leader of the Asian Church (see discussion in Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, vol. 2, chapter 7).

[The Book of Revelation does not suggest that John had "replaced Paul" as the respected leader of the Asian churches. John writes only as John, not as Paul's "replacement." Could not the churches respect two apostles at the same time? The Jerusalem church respected 12 at the same time! The churches of Asia actually had turned away from Paul (2 Tim.1:15) before his death (AD 67). Why would not John, who later lived in Ephesus, immediately fill that vacuum after Paul's death? Geisler's (and Guthrie's) argument here is very weak.]

M. LD objects to "The pretribulational rapture model featured in the Left Behind series [that] interprets Revelation 13, for example, in a strictly literal fashion" (I, #3).

Comments: It all depends on what is meant by "strictly literal." If "strictly literal" means the unique interpretation of Tim LaHaye that the Antichrist resurrects himself, then we agree with LD that this is wrong. However, we must be careful not to paint all futurists with the same broad brush. There are a lot of them who do not agree with LaHaye here, including the commentary produced by the Dallas Seminary faculty (see Walvoord and Zuck, Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 2, p. 960). And it would not be fair to leave the impression that LaHaye's interpretation of Revelation 13 is essential to, or even characteristic of, the futurist view of Revelation. After all, if we take the text literally, it does not say the Beast was "resurrected" from the dead. It says that his deadly "wound" was "healed" (Rev. 13:12).

[This shows that the ambiguity that attends taking a non-literal view of Revelation is also a problem for those who profess to take a literal view! They often say, "If you don't take it literally, you can have endless possible interpretations!" However, anyone who reads enough dispensational literature will soon find that even those who profess to follow a literal hermeneutic are capable of reaching many different conclusions. Geisler admits this and gives a good example right here.]

N. LD affirms that "As the characters in the novel deal with tribulation, they are sustained by the hope of resurrection that Jesus gives all of us, not with a belief that they are meant to be taken away from trouble by a rapture" (I, #4 cf. I, #5).

Comments: This is a false either/or when it is a both/and situation. The resurrection and the rapture take place at the same time, whenever that time is (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Even those who are raptured will receive their permanent glorified body at that time (1 Cor. 15:50-56). Of course, they are distinct events in the sense that the dead are raised "first" and those alive are "caught up" with them to "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). But these events happen at the same time, and they both receive their permanent immortal, imperishable body at that moment (1 Cor. 15:50-56). So, the two hopes cannot be separated.

[I agree with Geisler on this point.]

O. LD declares that "Prior to the nineteenth century all Christians-including all premillennialists-believed the rapture or the resurrection of believers and the second coming of Christ were simultaneous events and not two distinct happenings separated by at least seven years" (I, #6).

Comments: This is plainly and simply false. The early Ephraem manuscript (see Thomas Ice, When the Trumpet Sounds, 110-111) reveals the pretrib view was held as early as the 300s A.D. And even if the first known reference is later, truth is not determined by time. This is the fallacy of "Chronological Snobbery." The amillennial view itself (with which this point in LD accords) is "late" since most of the early Fathers were premillennial including Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and the early Augustine. Other futurists (whose view is opposed by LD) include even earlier subapostolic writings like Irenaeus, Ignatius, the Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, Papias, Clement of Rome, Lactantius, Methodius, Epiphanius, and others (see George Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, vol. 1, pp. 304, 324, 451).

[It is amusing that Geisler speaks of amillennialism (which was taught by Origen in the third century) as "late," but then admits the earliest belief in a pre-trib rapture was with Ephraim (fourth century). This would suggest that amillennialism and pre-tribulationism both appeared equally "late" or equally "early" (depending on how one views the third century).

Actually, most of the beliefs common to amillennialists, and rejected by dispensationalists, were held even by the earlier premillennial fathers. Though (unlike amillennialists) they believed in a future millennialism, yet (like the amillennialists) they did not interpret prophecy literally, did not make a consistent distinction between Israel and the church, did not believe in the restoration of the nation Israel in the last days, and did not believe in a pretribulation rapture (they expected the church to be persecuted by the antichrist). Even on the one disputed matter of the future millennialism, Justin Martyr (a premillennialist) mentioned, in writing to Trypho, that he knew of many true Christians in his day who did not share his view. Almost everything about amillennialism is found in all of these early premillennial fathers, and other fathers, who left nothing in writing, may have been amillennial, for all anyone can say.

There is dispute, on the other hand, about the meaning and the date of Ephraim's statement, which Geisler and Ice cite to prove an early belief in the pre-trib rapture. If Ephraim actually did believe in this, he stood against all of the reputable church fathers before and after him who wrote on the subject. Ephraim may have been as out-of-step with the orthodox thinking of his day as the "Word of Faith" teachers are today.]

P. "First, there is not a single passage in Scripture that teaches a pretribulation rapture" (I, #6).

Comment: In one sense this is true, but it is very misleading. For in the strict sense, there is not a single passage of Scripture that teaches the Trinity either, but that does not mean it is not biblically based. And in this broader sense of biblically based, which must be allowed for the doctrines of the Trinity and inerrancy, the pretrib view is biblical as well (see Renald Showers, Maranatha: Our Lord Comes). For in the broader sense, these doctrines are not based on a single text but on all the data of Scripture on the topic put in a consistent systematic whole that best explains them with whatever varying degree of certitude (see Geisler, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, chap. 12).

[Hank's statement is correct, and so is Geisler when he says that this cannot be the final determiner of whether the scriptures teach a doctrine or not. The trinity is not taught in any one passage, but it is the unmistakable conclusion that comes from taking every relevant passage seriously and

harmoniously. This is not true of the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture. The rapture is said to occur at "the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess.4:15, 17/ 2 Thess.1:7-8; 2:1). Geisler admitted (in point "N" above) that the rapture and the resurrection occur simultaneously. Since the resurrection is unambiguously declared to occur on "the last day" (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54) and to take place at the same time as the resurrection and judgment of the lost (John 12:48/ Matt.25:31ff/ John 5:28-29/ Acts 24:15), it would seem disingenuous to say that the scripture even leaves room for a belief in a pretribulational rapture.]

Q. "There is no biblical warrant for LaHaye's hypothesis that believers will be resurrected some one thousand seven years before the resurrection of unbelievers" (I, #6).

Comments: If this means there is no biblical warrant for believing in the pretrib view, then one must beg to disagree. Detailed reasons are listed in the forthcoming volume four of our Systematic Theology: The Church and Last Things (chapter 17). Or, if this means there is no biblical basis for believing there are two resurrections, one before and one after "the thousand years," then one must strongly disagree. Even non-dispensationalists, like George Ladd, agree that a literal (historical-grammatical) interpretation of Revelation 20 demands a premillennial conclusion of a first physical resurrection before the thousand years and a second physical resurrection after it (see Ladd, The Blessed Hope). Just the phrase, "and the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:5) makes this view clear. The alternative interpretations must spiritualize (allegorize) this text. Indeed, to deny the premillennial view one must take the first resurrection as spiritual and the second one as literal. Ironically, only the first one is actually called a "resurrection" (Rev. 20:5-6), though "live again" (Gk. ezasan) is used of both (vv. 4-5). Nowhere in Scripture is the word "resurrection" ever used in a spiritual sense. So, to spiritualize the "first resurrection" is a gross violation of the literal (historical-grammatical) method of interpretation.

[To spiritualize the first resurrection may indeed be a violation of some arbitrary, humanly devised "literal...method of interpretation," but what of it? Many of the beliefs of the dispensationalists themselves violate a strictly "literal" method (e.g., recognizing that Jesus is not really a literal lamb, having seven eyes and seven horns--Rev.5:6).

That the first resurrection is indeed spiritual, and the second is physical is affirmed in John's other major work (John 5:24, 28f/ cf. Eph.2:1-2). The fact that the word "resurrection" is not elsewhere (other than Revelation 20:5-6) used to speak of spiritual rebirth is no more significant than is the fact that the name "Jezebel" was never elsewhere (apart from Revelation 2:20) used to designate anyone other than Ahab's wife. Revelation has many original features, vis-a-vis the rest of scripture.]

R. "The plain and proper reading of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm" (I, #7).

Comments: We agree. But if this is so, then the plain and proper reading of Revelation 20 will yield a futurist premillennial view contrary to LD. Yet LD opposes this futurist view in favor of a kind of amillennial view. (1) This conclusion is inconsistent with its alleged literal method of interpreting the Bible.

[Yes, it is inconsistent with any "alleged literal method of interpretation," but it is not at odds with a "proper" reading of the text. I will admit that the meaning of Revelation 20, like many other passages in prophetic books, is not as "plain" as we could wish it to be. However, once one has become free from the constraints of an arbitrary, literalistic, dispensational hermeneutic, and is at liberty to let scripture interpret scripture, there is no meaning of Revelation 20 plainer than the amillennial one. I know this, because I was once a knowledgeable and convinced dispensationalist

and became amillennial very gradually as a result of reluctantly releasing my grip on my dispensational assumptions and by finally allowing the Bible to interpret itself.]

Conclusion

The basic goals of LD are admirable, and its basic doctrines are within orthodoxy. Nonetheless, the dialogue on methodology is important since orthodoxy is dependant on a proper literal (historical-grammatical) interpretation of the Bible. However, LD does not appear to measure up to the standards of its own alleged literal method. In rejecting a futurist (2) interpretation of Revelation, LD must reject a literal interpretation of many passages in Revelation and in Matthew 24-25 which they claim were fulfilled in the first century. And if this same non-literal method were applied to other passages like the Gospels, then it would undermine historical Christianity. Hence, the issue is of great importance. So, on this matter we must respectfully disagree agreeably with our good friend Hank Hanegraaff.

[Here Geisler becomes dislodged from all reality. He suggests that "orthodoxy is dependent on a proper literal...interpretation of the Bible." Yet this is far from evident, and literalism is not practiced consistently by any biblical student or scholar, including Geisler. Even Matthew 24 and 25 are not taken (and can not be taken) with a consistent literalism. Does Geisler believe that those who get into heaven will be those who have more literal oil in their literal lamps than do others (Matt. 25:1ff)? Does he not consider that oil in this parable represents something that is actually not literal oil? If so, what objection can be raised to believing that, in Revelation, a "beast" can represent something other than a literal animal; that a "lamb" can represent something other than a literal sheep; that a dragon can represent something other than a literal reptile; that a "chain" can represent something other than a literal chain; or that a thousand years can represent something other than a literal thousand years? Where does Geisler draw the line on "literal"?

Geisler's statement, "if this same non-literal method were applied to other passages like the Gospels, then it would undermine historical Christianity," pushes the limits of absurdity! Who ever suggested that the Gospels, which are historical narratives, should be interpreted with the same hermeneutic as the Book of Revelation, which is apocalyptic prophecy? Who, that is, besides the dispensationalists, who are apparently so naive as to require a one-size-fits-all approach to biblical interpretation, regardless of genre. It scares me to see men who actually teach biblical apologetics in our institutions of higher learning, but who can be so clueless about the most basic rules of biblical interpretation [namely, that one must identify genre before interpreting individual passages]! What kind of graduates can we expect these schools to produce, if the professors have no better ability to think logically than this?]

Yet I would suggest a more excellent way. LD rightly criticizes excesses in some futurists' interpretation of some texts. But the same could be done for preterists' interpretations which claim these predictions were fulfilled in A.D. 70. Would it not be better for LD to be content to show the inconsistencies of some futurists' interpretations, rather than attacking the whole premillennial futurist scheme which is firmly rooted in the historical-grammatical interpretation of all of Scripture, including prophecy, and amply exhibited in the majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity?

[Geisler should actually read "the majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity" before he tries to pretend that they employed the literalistic method of interpretation that he advocates!]

For when the literal method is applied to the unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, it yields a futurist interpretation of Scripture...

[Not so. I employ a very literalistic method to my interpretation of Matt.3:9/John 8:37-40/ Rom.2:28-29; 11:16-17/ Galatians 3:7-9, 16, 29/ Phil.3:3/ 1 Thess.2:15-16/ 1 Pet.2:9-10, and many other passages, which tell me that the Abrahamic covenant does not apply to an ethnically-defined race of people, but to the community of faith (the church) regardless of race.]

...which affirms that Christ will not only physically return to earth but He will also establish a literal kingdom (Mt. 19:28)...

[This is not the only way in which Matt.19:28 can be interpreted. There is a good biblical case for the suggestion that the present age is "the regeneration," and that Christ is already sitting on the "throne of His glory" (Matt.28:18/Eph.1:20-22/1 Pet.3:22/ Rev.3:21). There are direct statements, however, that unambiguously tell us that Jesus established His kingdom at His first coming, and that it is a present reality (Matt.5:3, 10; 12:28/ Luke 17:21/ Rom.14:17/ Col.1:13/ Rev.5:10).]

...and reign for a literal thousand years (Rev. 20)...

[This is begging the question. The passage says "a thousand years." It does not say, "a literal thousand years." The question of whether the thousand years is literal, or whether it is a symbol, is precisely what is here in dispute.]

...restoring the literal Land of Promise to the literal descendants of Abraham from Iraq to Syria to Lebanon, the territory of the Palestinians, and all the way to Egypt (Gen. 13:15-17; 15:7-21) "forever" (Gen 13:15).

[I don't find the word "literal" in any of the passages cited. I do, however, find clear teaching in the New Testament that "the Land" and "the descendants of Abraham" have their fulfillments in a spiritual ("heavenly") country (Heb.4:8-10; 11:16) and that the real descendants of Abraham to whom the promises apply are the Christians, not the Jews (see the verses listed four paragraphs above). This is the plain meaning of Galatians 4:21-31).

Many things were said to be "forever," including the curses and reproach that Yahweh said would come upon Israel and their descendants "forever" if they broke His covenant, which they did (Deut.28:45-46). God fulfilled His promise in giving the descendants of Abraham all the land He had promised, in the days of Joshua. Dispensationalists apparently think God is a liar, because they say that God never kept this promise and that the Jews have never possessed all the land God promised them. In this, they flatly contradict the Bible (Josh.21:43-45).

The children of Israel were not given an unconditional, permanent grant to the land of Palestine, but were told that they could lose it by disobedience (Lev.18:26-28; 25:23/ Deut.28:21, 63).

In the Old Testament, the duty of circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, the Levitical priesthood, Solomon's temple, and many other institutions that no longer exist in their original form were said to be "forever." All of them continue today in their spiritual forms, of which the Old Testament forms were types. This is true of the land promises as well.]

Likewise, the literal method of interpretation demands that there will be a literal throne of David on which the Messiah will actually reign on a throne in Jerusalem over the restored literal descendants of Abraham "forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

[Yes, the "literal method" would indeed require this. This is an example of why the strictly literal method is flawed. The apostles believed that God had fulfilled the promise that David's seed would

sit upon his throne when Jesus arose and ascended to the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-36; 13:32-34).]

But these unconditional promises have never been fulfilled, even though God made them with an "immutable" oath (Heb. 6:17-18 cf. Ps. 89:20-37).

[Sorry, but the New Testament writers simply disagree with Geisler's claim that these promises "have never been fulfilled." See Luke 1:70-75 and 2 Corinthians 1:20.]

A Response to Steve Gregg's Defense of Hank Hanegraaff's Partial Preterism

by Norman L. Geisler

Points of Agreement with Steve Gregg

My comments will be divided into two basic categories. First of all, several areas in which we are in agreement will be mentioned. Second, comments on numerous points of disagreement with his defense of partial preterism, a view he shares with Hank Hanegraaff, will be discussed.

First, Steve Gregg is correct in acknowledging that Hank Hanegraaff's view is a form of "partial preterism." He chides Hank on his unwillingness to admit he is a partial preterist "for fear of alienating listeners." He also observes that Hank's phrase "exegetical eschatology" does not "reveal anything about the specific content of his eschatological ideas." We agree that is not a descriptive phrase. Indeed, it appears to be a misnomer.

Second, Gregg rightly points to an inconsistency in Hanks view when he claims that he is using a "literal" method of interpretation when in fact he takes much of prophetic revelation in a non-literal way. Indeed, it would be more forthright to admit that it is not really a literal method of interpreting these prophetic texts at all.

Third, we also agree with Gregg's criticism of Hank's identification of the Neronian persecutions with "the Great Tribulation." Of course, Gregg has his own problem of identifying it with only Judean believers. This does not solve the problem for preterists, for the many things predicted to happen to them simply never happened before A.D. 70—unless, of course, one completely allegorizes away the literal meaning of the text of Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18. For these texts speak of one third of the stars falling from the sky, one third of human beings destroyed, and all the life in the sea dying! Surely, virtually everyone would agree that these events did not literally occur in A.D. 66-70. Hence, the only way to maintain their preterist view is to allegorize these scriptures.

Fourth, Gregg agrees with my criticism that Hank makes a false either/or dichotomy between the resurrection and the rapture, insisting that the former, not the latter, is the suffering believer's real hope. But if this is so, then why do preterist like Gregg insist that terms like "soon" and "in a little while" have to refer to a first century event in order to be relevant to the believers to whom they were written? After all, they claim the resurrection is still future after 1900 years.

Fifth, Gregg agrees with me against Hanegraaff that it is an illegitimate argument to say that we should not believe something if "there is not a single passage in Scripture that teaches" it. If so, they we could not believe in the Trinity or inerrancy. However, Gregg then goes on to argue fallaciously that the pretribulational rapture should be rejected. We have shown elsewhere that there is good biblical grounds for accepting a pretribulational rapture (see Systematic Theology, vol. 4, chap. 17). In spite of all these arguments, Gregg confidently supposes that his one "four term fallacy" argument confuses different aspects of the "last day" and leaves no room for a pretrib rapture. By the same logic one could prove that there is no room for a Second Comings of Christ because His First and Second Coming are sometimes placed together in one Old Testament text (e.g., Isa. 61:1-2 cf. Lk. 4:19; Acts 2:17, 20) or are both viewed as part of the "last days" (Heb.1:2 cf. 2 Pet. 3:3-4). Likewise, there is no reason why the resurrection of the righteous cannot encompass both those who are resurrected before the tribulation and those who die after that and are resurrected at the end of the tribulation.

Points of Disagreement with Steve Gregg

Of course, there were many things on which Gregg agrees with Hank Hanegraaff in defense of their common view of partial preterism. A number of them will be noted here.

First, Gregg wrongly assumes there is a difference between the “historical-grammatical” and “literal” method of interpretation. In fact, the Latin title for the view is *sensus literalis* (the literal sense). Preterists and amills often mis-characterize the literal method as leaving no room for symbols and figures of speech. This is simply false (see *ibid.*, vol. 4, chap. 13).

Second, Gregg unsuccessfully attempts to avoid the heresy of full preterism by claiming that the whole book of Revelation could have been fulfilled in A.D. 70 and the Second Coming and resurrection could be mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. This fails to note that the word “resurrection” always means physical resurrection in Scripture and that Revelation 20:6 speaks of the “first resurrection.” Further, to deny Revelation 19 is about the Second Coming is to miss the very climax of the Book of Revelation itself. The same is true of Revelation 22:12 which speaks of Christ’s Second Coming and his rewards. This is to say nothing of the final judgment scene of the “great white throne” in chapter 20 which did not occur in A.D. 70. This being the case, partial preterist are inconsistent in using the references to “soon,” “shortly,” and “near” to refer to A.D. 70, for then they must admit that there is no future resurrection and Second Coming—which is the heretical view of full preterism. As demonstrated from the Greek, “shortly” (*tachu*) means “quickly” or at a rapid rate. And “at hand” (Phil. 4:5; Jas. 5:8) means imminent, not necessarily what will happen in a short time. Likewise, even Gregg admits that terms like “a little while” (Haggai 2:6-7) can mean hundreds of years. Time is relative to God (2 Peter 3:9). If so, then their argument for preterism fails at this point. As for Hebrews 10:37, Gregg offers only his “opinion” without reasons that it is about A. D. 70, when it is clearly about Christ’s Second Coming as both the language and context indicate. For it speaks about our “reward” and “heaven” (vv. 34-35).

Third, if a prediction about an event hundreds of years yet in the future can be relevant to the readers (as Gregg admits about the resurrection/rapture), then there is no reason why distant predictions of how God will defeat evil and bring in everlasting righteousness cannot be relevant to the immediate generation to whom the prophecy was first given. No matter how distant Christ Second Coming is, it is relevant to our lives today, just as the predictions about His First Coming were relevant to Old Testament saints, even though they were made hundreds of years in advance. Paul comforts the Thessalonians with the prediction of the resurrection of loved ones which is already nearly 2000 years later and still not fulfilled (1 Thes. 4:13-18). So, contrary to Gregg, this does not make God a “tease.” For God is offering now the greatest comfort possible, namely, that eventually all suffering, pain, and death will be over (Rev. 21:1-4). We can take a lot now, if we know it will all be over later (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17).

Fourth, as for Rev. 22:10, Gregg totally overlooks our point that Daniel’s prediction was not fulfilled in John’s day because John was not told it was fulfilled in his day but only that it could now be understood by those who read it. But even Gregg has to admit this interpretation is “possible,” and his rejection of it is on the subjective grounds that he finds it “unconvincing” and “awkward.”

Fifth, Gregg reveals his hermeneutical colors when he rejects the literal nature of the plagues in Revelation claiming they are “apocalyptic” in contrast to the other similar biblical plagues like those on Pharaoh that were admittedly “historical.” The root problem with preterism, of both kinds, is the rejection of a consistent application of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Amazingly, Gregg believes that in the same “Olivet Discourse” there are many

“genres [which] call for a different hermeneutic.” Indeed, he suggests there are three different hermeneutics in this one passage—part is “literal language, part is apocalyptic language, and part is parabolic”! No wonder preterism engenders such confusion.

Sixth, like other preterists Gregg has difficulty with the fact that many of the earliest Fathers rejected this view. Indeed, Ireaneus who knew the apostle John’s disciple Polycarp rejected preterism, as did Victorinus and Eusebius after him. Gregg’s comments about them not accepting the canonicity of Revelation are both unsupported and irrelevant. The point is that they rejected the preterist position. Likewise, for his own private anti-patristic and allegoristic interpretation of these events, he dismissed a continuous strain of Fathers from just after the apostles through the fourth century who were opposed to preterism (see our Systematic Theology vol. 4, 665-668).

Seventh, Gregg points to early signs of apostasy in the NT as evidence against the argument that John wrote Revelation late. But this overlooks several import facts. There was nearly a generation between the time of Christ and the apostasy that characterized the church of Paul’s, Peter’s, and Jude’s epistles. Likewise, there is nearly another generation between the 60s and Domitian’s reign under which John wrote. Despite local problems earlier, the general character of the churches in Revelation differs significantly from those before A.D. 70.

Eighth, Gregg speaks against the literal interpretation as “a low view of prophesy” that claims a “prophet cannot discuss future developments before they arise.” Yet he seems blissfully unaware that this is precisely what the preterist do with Matthew 24-25 and the bulk of the Book of Revelation.

Ninth, Gregg dismisses the cumulative weight of ten arguments for the late date of Revelation (which strongly opposes preterism), using statements like “How do we know?” “This is not self-evident” and “This is as subjective as the previous point.” But he provides no definitive response to any objection or to the overall weight of all the objections to an early date for Revelation. And, unlike the futurists view, preterism is completely dependent on an early date for the Book of Revelation. Hence, the strong evidence for a late date for Revelation (after A.D. 70) is a strong argument against preterism.

Tenth, he wrongly argues that several possible literal interpretations of a passages, as futurists have of some texts, is justification for preterists taking different allegorical interpretations of these literal events. This is an insightful example of a false analogy.

Eleventh, it is amusing that Gregg uses a third century heretical teacher, Origen, as a basis for his amillennial view and dismisses earlier second century orthodox Fathers as a basis for futurism. Further, contrary to Gregg, Renald Showers (in Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!) has demonstrated that the very earliest Fathers believed in an imminent coming of Christ, not just the fourth century Ephraem. This is to say nothing of the inspired writings of the NT which proclaim Christ’s imminent return repeatedly (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 15:51-53; 16:22; Phil. 3:20-21; 4:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:9, 23; 2 Thes. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jas. 5:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 1 Jn. 2:28-3:2; Jude 21; Rev. 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20). Passages like “The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5) and “the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jas.5:8) can hardly mean anything other than imminent, unless one is a full preterist and denies a literal future Second Coming, claiming Christ returned in the first century. He summarily dismisses all this with a vague “for all anyone can say” and a guilt-by-association with the Word of Faith movement!

Twelfth, after rejecting the early Fathers who were opposed to preterism, Gregg inconsistently appeals to the early Fathers to justify his amillennial views. He speaks of the pretrib beliefs

before Ephraem in the fourth century as unsupported by earlier Fathers. Yet, he criticizes futurist who use the early Fathers to support their view (see "Sixth" above).

Thirteenth, he rejects the dispensational belief in a literal restoration of Israel which is firmly based in the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture (see Geisler, *ibid.*, chap. 15). Yet he claims to hold the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

Fourteenth, Gregg makes the shocking statement that "to spiritualize the first resurrection may indeed be a violation of some arbitrary, humanly devised 'literal...method of interpretation,' but what of it?" First of all, the literal method is not humanly devised nor arbitrary. It is an undeniable method of interpretation since one cannot deny it without using it. So, the literal method of interpretation is literally undeniable. Here again, the root problem of preterism is laid bare. To use its own word, their interpretations of prophecy "spiritualize" a lot of prophecy. Incredibly, Gregg brushes off the inconsistency of taking one resurrection literally in the same passage which uses the same words to describe both resurrections by appealing to another passage in a different context that is talking about regeneration (Eph. 2:1), not resurrection. Even more strangely, he uses another text which is speaking about two literal resurrections (Jn. 5:28f) of the "dead" bodies "in the graves" which will "come forth" at the command of Christ to justify that there is only one physical resurrection. He ignores the sound exegesis of George Ladd (in *The Blessed Hope*), who is not a dispensationalist, but who demonstrates that Revelation 20 is speaking about two literal resurrections. Indeed, the very historical-grammatical hermeneutic which Gregg claims to embrace demands such an interpretation.

Fifteenth, Gregg incorrectly separates the "literal method of interpretation" from a "proper reading of the text." But he surely would object if one considered it proper not to take these words of his literally. To show how blinded one can be by his own hermeneutical presuppositions, Gregg claims "there is no meaning of Revelation 20 plainer than the amillennial one." Nothing could be further from the fact, since the same phrase "lived again" is used by the same author in the same text, one before and one after the "thousand years." And Gregg admits it is a literal resurrection. Further, the two resurrections are said to be separated by "a thousand years," a term used six times in five verses. Finally, the "thousand years" has a beginning and an end that is "finished." The bookends of this literal time period are said to be two different literal events, one of which is called "the first resurrection." Oddly enough, the amills take this to be the spiritual one (when the term "resurrection" is never used spiritually in the NT), and the other resurrection (which is not even called that as such) they believe is the literal resurrection. If one can use such a twisted contorted logic on this text, there is no surprise what a preterist can do with the same hermeneutical gyrations on other texts like those of Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18. And perish the thought of what the preterist could do with the historicity of early Genesis or of the Gospels if they would ever become consistent with their allegorical interpretation!

Sixteenth, to borrow his own term, Gregg becomes "dislodged from reality" by denying that "orthodoxy is dependant on a proper literal...interpretation of the Bible." How one can consistently hold orthodox theology on any other basis. Take for example the unquestioned orthodox belief in the literal death and literal resurrection of Christ. How can one derive this from Scripture with anything but a proper literal interpretation of Scripture? And yet by the same non-literal method of interpreting prophecy used by preterist, one would have to deny the orthodox teaching of the literal death and resurrection of Christ. In point of fact, full preterism is doctrinally unorthodox and partial preterism is methodologically unorthodox.

Seventeenth, one cannot help but be amazed at the audacity of some preterists. Gregg actually charges that I have not read the “majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity.” How does he know this? In fact, I have read all of them and virtually all of their published writings. Further, I never asserted that they all employed a consistent “literalistic method” of interpretation, as Gregg alleges. I only contented that many of them, some of whom were close to the apostles, rejected the inconsistent partial preterist methodology.

Eighteenth, Gregg dismisses a massive array of unconditional promises that are based on the historical-grammatical interpretation which says that there will be a literal restoration of ethnic Israel to their land (see our Systematic Theology, vol. 4, chaps.14-16). None of the passages he cites deny this future for Israel, and numerous passages he does not cite affirm that there will be one (Gen. 12-17; 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 89; Mt. 19:28; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 3:19; Rom. 11, and many more). So strongly are these texts in favor of a literal restoration of the land and throne promises to ethnic Israel that even some non-premills like Vern Poythress and Anthony Hoekema have been forced to acknowledge such a future for Israel. And not to see that Paul is speaking of ethnic Israel in Romans 9-11 (which he calls Israel “my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:2) to whom God gave “the covenants” and “Promises” (9:4) is a bold act of exegetical blindness. And it is this same “Israel” in this same passage of which Paul says they will be “grafted into their own olive tree” (11:24) because “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29). Ironic as it may seem, a fundamental problem with reformed amillennialism is that it does not believe in unconditional election—at least not for Israel! As for the clear literal truth that Jesus will literally come again with his literal twelve disciples who sit on twelve literal thrones and reign over the literal “twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19:28), the best Gregg can offer is “the suggestions” that “this is not the only way in which Matt. 19:28 can be interpreted.” Of course, it isn’t; there is the spiritualistic way Gregg interprets it as “a present reality.” But this is certainly not the result of the historical grammatical hermeneutic preterists profess to accept. Nor is his contention that Jesus “unambiguously” established His kingdom at His first coming, as any literal understanding of numerous passages reveals (see Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6-8; 3:19-21; Rom. 11:11-36). For an example of straining out a hermeneutical gnat and swallowing a doctrinal camel, Gregg declares of Revelation 20 that “the passage says ‘a thousand years.’ It does not say, ‘a literal thousand years.’” The passage also says “the Devil” (v. 2) and not “a literal Devil,” but does this give us warrant for denying a literal Devil. It also speaks of “nations” (v. 3), martyrs (v. 4), “heaven” (v. 1), and even “Jesus” (v. 4). But surely all these are literal. Sure, there are figures of speech used in the text like “key” (v. 1), but the literal method of interpretation has always allowed for figures of speech about literal realities (see *ibid.*, chap. 13). It simply insists that the figures of speech and symbols are about literal realities (cf. Rev. 1:20).

Nineteenth, when confronted with the obviously literal land promises to Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 13-15), Gregg replies, “I don’t find the word ‘literal’ in any of the passages cited.” Yet, he later says these literal promises were literally fulfilled in the days of Joshua—something that could not be true since they are repeated after Joshua’s time (Jer. 11:5; Amos 9:14-15; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 11). As for insisting on the use of the word “literal” to determine whether a passage is literal, I would suggest that he look at the death and resurrection of Jesus passages again. The last time I looked the word “literal” was not in the resurrection accounts. Nor do I find it in Genesis 1-3. But there again, consistency of hermeneutic is not a primary characteristic of the preterist position. Further, it is far from “clear” that Heb. 4 or Gal. 4 teaches there is no ethnic fulfillment of the ethnic promises to Israel. On the contrary, it is a denial of both God’s unconditional grace and of the historical-grammatical interpretation of numerous passages already mentioned. Just because Abraham has a spiritual seed does not mean there are no promises for his ethnic offspring.

Twentieth, as to the promise that the land promises to Israel would be “forever,” Gregg says two things: 1) The Hebrew word for “forever” (olam) does not always mean eternal. While this is true, it is also true that it can. And when it does not, it certainly means a long period of time. But Israel has never occupied all the land designated in these promises for a long period of time. As all good interpreters know, the meaning of a word is discovered by its context. And the context of Psalm 89:37 declares that the Davidic covenant will be “established forever like the moon.” And the last time I looked the moon was still in the sky! 2) Greggs wrongly assumes God’s promises to Abraham and David were conditional, but they clearly were not. Abraham was not even conscious when God made a unilateral unconditional promise to him (in Gen. 15:12), and Psalm 89:31-36 declares that even “if they break my statutes,” God promised “Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed will endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me.” As Paul said of this same God, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). God has not given them back the land yet, but will in the future when the remnant returns to Him (e.g., see Gen. 13:17 and Deut. 30:16-20).

Twenty-first, to illustrate how wrong the allegorical method can be, Gregg boldly proclaims against the literal historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, calling it “flawed,” saying that “the apostles believed that God had fulfilled the promise that David’s seed would sit upon a throne when Jesus arose and ascended to the right hand of God.” This flatly contradicts a literal interpretation of Scripture for several reasons. First, the Old Testament predictions about a descendant of David were about a Messiah who would sit on a literal throne of David and reign from Jerusalem and have literal descendants (2 Sam. 7; Isa. 11; 24; 32; 55; Psa. 89). Second, Jesus affirmed that he and his disciples would reign on literal thrones when he returned (Mt. 19:28). Third, the last thing Jesus said before he left earth in response to when he would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6-8) was it was not for them to know when he would do it but that in the interim they should preach the Gospel to all the world. Only two chapters later Peter preached that if Israel would repent God would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 3:19-21). Finally, later the apostle Paul speaks of the literal restoration of ethnic Israel as an event yet to come after the fullness of the Gentiles has come (Rom. 11:24-26). A reasonable historical grammatical interpretation of these texts will inform a seeking reader that the Davidic covenant was not fulfilled by an invisible, spiritual reign from heaven where Christ is at God’s right hand. Rather, it awaits a literal fulfillment when Christ will reign from a throne on earth (in Jerusalem) of all Israel who inherited the land promised unconditionally to Abraham (Gen. 13-17) from Egypt to Iraq.

Finally, Gregg offers no arguments against the clear biblical promises that God has made these Abrahamic and Davidic promises with an immutable oath (as Heb. 6:17 and Psa. 89:20-37). These powerful arguments are simply dismissed by Gregg with the curt comment: “Sorry, but the New Testament writers simply disagree with Geisler’s claim that these promises ‘have never been fulfilled.’ See Luke 1:70-75 and 2 Corinthians 1:20.” We have already shown above that this is not the case. And there is nothing in Luke 1 nor 2 Cor. 1 to the contrary. Check them out. The first one is simply a prediction that the Messiah, son of David, would come and fulfill this covenant. It says nothing about whether it was completely fulfilled in Christ’s first coming and present session at the right hand of God. The second text (2 Cor. 1:20) is misapplied for several reasons: 1) That Christ fulfilled salvation promises does not mean he fulfilled the land and throne promises to Israel. 2) Even some reformed theologians (like Poythress and Hoekema) admit that there is still to come a literal fulfillment of these promises made to Israel. 3) Historical-grammatical interpretation of Old Testament land and throne promises cannot be allegorized away by amills and preterist misapplication of New Testament texts. As we have

demonstrated elsewhere, this kind of twisted interpretation of Old Testament text is not exegesis but eisegesis. Indeed, it is a retroactive eisegesis that reads back into the Old Testament texts a meaning that was never there either in the expressed intention of the author or as understood by the people to whom he wrote (see *ibid.*, chap. 13).

In brief, Gregg's attempt to rescue the partial preterist position he shares with Hank Hanegraaff is a failure. It rests upon a methodologically unorthodox way of interpreting Scripture. If this same method were used on the Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Christ, the preterist would also be theologically unorthodox. Thus, while partial preterism itself is not heretical, its hermeneutic is unorthodox, and if applied consistently, would lead to heresy, as indeed it does in full preterism.

Second Response to Norman Geisler

By Steve Gregg

I do not find much in Norman Geisler's recent analysis of my position that was absent from his earlier criticism of Hank Hanegraaff. I find no new arguments here that did not appear in that earlier piece. In my response (to which he is, ostensibly, responding here), I answered very thoroughly each of his points. In this latest document, he repeats the same arguments as if he had not read my responses. He even states that I "overlooked" certain points which I specifically answered in the document to which he claims to be responding. This raises questions as to whether he really even read my points, other than giving them a brief scanning, before writing his response to me.

Dr. Geisler's method of responding to arguments is quite different from my own. For one thing, in my response to him, I have pasted his own words directly into my document (**in boldface type**)—reproducing his arguments in context and in his own words. I simply attached my observations and criticisms below his actual paragraphs. By contrast, Geisler does not quote me at any length in his responses. He summarizes my statements in his own words, putting his own spin upon them. My context is omitted, and sometimes a single phrase of mine is retained and cast in a very different light from that in which my words originally appeared. Thus, he ends up not really responding to, nor even correctly representing my arguments. It seems to me that he merely ridicules the concepts he misunderstands. Why he misunderstands is a mystery to me. It often seems as if he did not really read or process my statements, but only scanned the page for concepts that he and his dispensational readers object to, and then ridicules them with standard dispensational rhetoric. I am sure he sees this differently, but in my estimation, he has not really answered my points or refuted anything by appeal to real biblical exegesis.

I have found myself in dialogue and debates with dispensationalists scores of times over the past 25 years. My observation from this experience would be that dispensational defenders cannot win on the basis of sound biblical exegesis, so they resort to three illegitimate tactics: 1) they ridicule or castigate what they cannot rationally refute; 2) they make up their own definitions of words, and 3) they impose upon biblical readers the duty of adopting arbitrary hermeneutical rules, which the biblical writers would never have recognized and with which they would not have complied. Take, for example, this classic case of definition manipulation, found in Dr. Geisler's first criticism of my article:

First, Gregg wrongly assumes there is a difference between the "historical-grammatical" and "literal" method of interpretation. In fact, the Latin title for the view is *sensus literalis* (the literal sense). Preterists and amills often mis-characterize the literal method as leaving no room for symbols and figures of speech. This is simply false.

It is the dispensationalists, not their opponents, who mis-characterize the meaning of the word "literal." Most English-speaking people use the word "literal" in the sense that the English dictionaries use it. The Oxford English Dictionary is not much different from all others I have consulted in defining "literal" as follows:

adjective 1. using or interpreting words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory. 2. (of a translation) representing the exact words of the original text. 3. free from distortion. 4. informal absolute (used for emphasis). 5. relating to a letter or letters of the alphabet.

Of the five definitions given above, only the first relates to the task of interpretation (our present

interest). Dispensationalists continually pretend that it is a mischaracterization of the word “literal” when we non-dispensationalists insist that this word leaves “no room for symbols and figures of speech.” Actually, this is the limitation that the authoritative dictionaries specifically place upon the word.

No matter how many hundreds of times dispensational scholars may repeat their mantra: “literal interpretation also leaves room for figures of speech,” they apparently have failed to convince the English lexicographers, so the dictionaries remain unchanged. The dispensationalists have not been authorized to reinvent the English language for the rest of us, so as to use their novel definitions to their own advantage in debate.

Furthermore, if their statement is true (i.e., that consistent “literal” interpretation allows for figures of speech to be interpreted idiomatically, not literally), then the very difference between themselves and those non-literalists, whose hermeneutic is alleged to be unorthodox, is entirely removed. If a literal hermeneutic includes making provision for non-literal figures of speech, then we are all, without distinction, using “the literal method” equally.

For example, when dispensationalists tell us that the catching up of John into heaven, in Revelation 4:1, represents the rapture of the church, they are not taking the passage “literally.” They are taking it allegorically. To say, “John represents the church going up,” is to use the language of allegory (as soon as you take John as “representing” something other than the man John, you have departed from literal interpretation—so why not just admit this? Is it embarrassing?).

Every time a dispensationalist repeats the common claim that the ‘seven spirits of God’ speak of the seven-fold Holy Spirit, he/she is taking the expression non-literally. Taken literally, the phrase speaks of seven spirits, and seeing it as a reference to seven distinct spirits would be the literal way of understanding it. Interpreting this phrase as a symbol of the Holy Spirit is quite all right. No one should be opposed to such interpretive conventions, when appropriate. What I oppose is the pretense that this can honestly be referred to as a “consistently literal interpretation.”

Of course, there is no rule in scripture (nor in the canons of common sense) that demands that the literal sense of a statement invariably must convey its intended meaning. The dispensationalists do not follow such a rule. Why do they criticize others for not following it?

To know that Dr. Geisler equates the phrase “grammatical-historical” with the Latin “sensus literalis” produces no valid support for the point he is arguing. The range of meaning of the Latin “literalis” is not identical to that of its modern English derivative “literal,” and Latin is not the language we are using in this discussion. When we say we are following a “literal interpretation,” we are speaking of certain rational processes and the logic employed in interpreting scripture. Our concern is with the process itself, not with Latin labels for the process.

Norm Geisler and I are writing for an English-speaking public. The word “literal,” when used in English, means what English dictionaries and English-speaking people recognize it to mean—not necessarily what its Latin root meant to the ancient Romans. For example, to recognize that the statement, “It’s raining cats and dogs,” is an idiom to be understood other than in its literal sense may or may not be consistent with whatever the Latins referred to as the “sensus literalis”—but when we are speaking English, we do not wish to confuse people by saying, “This statement should be taken literally.”

The same is true when the Bible speaks of Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” A literal “lamb” is not the same thing as a “man”—Jesus was “literally” the latter. He is the former only in a metaphorical sense. Dispensationalists suggest that they are still following a “literal approach” even when they

recognize the presence of metaphors. But English dictionaries say that “literal” means “without metaphor.” So we should be able to admit (without the slightest embarrassment) that we do not take such a phrase as “Lamb of God” literally.

This does not in any sense render it impossible to take such a phrase seriously or to make good sense of it. It simply is not “literal.” A fact does not have to be stated in literal terms in order to be represented truthfully. When God repeatedly described Canaan as “a land flowing with milk and honey”—this was stating a truth, but not in literal terms. Recognizing the presence of a non-literal idiom does not hinder us from understanding the text as the writer intended it to be understood—in fact, it is a necessary prerequisite for reaching the correct understanding. Thus, taking “Lamb of God” non-literally is a necessary part of the grammatical-historical approach.

It is artificial to equate “grammatical-historical hermeneutics” with “literalism.” The two concepts have never been identical. Centuries prior to the advent of dispensationalism (1830), the grammatical-historical approach to scripture was associated with the methods of the reformers, like Luther, Calvin and Knox (all of whom were non-literalistic amillennialists). These biblical scholars never dreamed that the grammatical-historical method required them to follow the literalistic methods recommended by dispensationalists. These two ideas are not synonymous.

A fair description of the grammatical-historical method that would be universally accepted by all responsible exegetes would be very similar to that given by Professor Bruce Terry, Chair of the School of Biblical Studies at Ohio Valley University:

“The purpose in grammatical-historical exegesis is to understand to the extent possible the original intention of the author.” <http://web.ovc.edu/terry/interpretation/exegesis.htm>

This is the meaning of the term as I learned it and have found it to be used by scholars in the thirty seven years I have been studying and teaching the Bible (the first eight of which, I was teaching dispensationalism). If we take “grammatical-historical” to mean “the sense intended by the original writer,” this clearly is not the same thing as the “literal sense”—unless the writer under consideration intended his words to be taken in the literal sense.

It is plain that metaphors, symbols, idioms and apocalyptic imagery are commonly used in biblical books, all of which are to be understood according to their intended sense (i.e., metaphorically, symbolically, idiomatically, etc.), rather than literally.

Of course, dispensationalists actually do not follow a consistently-literal hermeneutic any more than do amillennialists (preterism actually follows a more literal hermeneutic to many passages than do most dispensationalists or amillennialists). Like everybody else, dispensationalists take some things literally, and some things figuratively. Their point of difference from others is in their idiosyncratic claim that, when they are taking something figuratively, they are still taking it “literally”!

Second, Gregg...fails to note that the word “resurrection” always means physical resurrection in Scripture and that Revelation 20:6 speaks of the “first resurrection.”

To suggest that I “failed to note” that the word “resurrection” is always (elsewhere) used of physical resurrection is to reveal that my esteemed critic did not read what I wrote very carefully. He had made this very point in his first article and I did not “fail to note” his point. In fact, I addressed his point, and took issue with his conclusions. My response to this point was apparently unanswerable, since he does not refute me, and apparently prefers to conceal what I said from his readers. Here

are the relevant comments from my earlier article:

“The fact that the word ‘resurrection’ is not elsewhere (other than Revelation 20:5-6) used to speak of spiritual rebirth is no more significant than is the fact that the name ‘Jezebel’ was never elsewhere (apart from Revelation 2:20) used to designate anyone other than Ahab’s wife. Revelation has many original features, vis-a-vis the rest of scripture.”

Ironically, Geisler was mistaken (and I was mistaken in taking his claims at face value without checking) in his very premise that “the word ‘resurrection’ always means physical resurrection.” This simply is not factually correct. There is an obvious example of “anastasis” (the word for “resurrection” in Revelation 20:5-6) being used elsewhere in scripture without any reference to physical resurrection (for the knowledge of which I am indebted to a correspondent at our web forum). Simeon said that Jesus would cause “the fall and the rising again (anastasis) of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). This “falling” was not physical; nor was the “rising again.” The polarization that Jesus caused in Israel (also predicted by John the Baptist—Matt.3:10-12), resulted in the reprobates “falling” into calamity under God’s judgment (in AD 70), and the believing remnant “rising again” in regeneration (at Pentecost).

If one wishes to insist that the anastasis in this verse is physical and literal, then he/she must also allow that the “falling” was physical as well.

Further, to deny Revelation 19 is about the Second Coming is to miss the very climax of the Book of Revelation itself.”

If the scholarly community with which my esteemed critic interacts is so in-bred as to mistake this statement for an argument, rather than recognizing it as a mere, unsubstantiated assertion of an opinion, then the task of dialoguing across the borders to one another will be more difficult than I had anticipated.

This is to say nothing of the final judgment scene of the “great white throne” in chapter 20 which did not occur in A.D. 70.

My esteemed critic certainly must know that I, like virtually all partial preterists, accept a futurist interpretation of the “great white throne judgment,” as he himself does.

I had written (contra Geisler) that even a person taking a full-preterist view of Revelation (he knows that I do not) could still, theoretically, believe—upon other grounds—in the future second coming of Christ. My point was that the Book of Revelation is not the only source of our information about the end of the world, and that, even if the book was not considered relevant to the subject (or even if it were not part of the New Testament canon at all), there is plenty of New Testament data elsewhere upon which to base our belief in the future resurrection and judgment.

That is the point I made in my article, which he is apparently attacking. My point is self-evidently true. His attack is, therefore, misguided. The disagreement between us is not about whether full-preterism is true or not (we both reject it). The point is whether we need to embrace any particular interpretation of the Book of Revelation in order to believe in the future second coming of Christ. One needs only to read the Thessalonian epistles to know that this would not be necessary.

This being the case, partial preterist[s] are inconsistent in using the references to “soon,” “shortly,” and “near” to refer to A.D. 70, for then they must admit that there is no future resurrection and Second Coming—which is the heretical view of full preterism.

My esteemed critic here continues to act as if he has not read the response that he is critiquing. This invalid claim (which he had made in his first article) was directly answered in my earlier response. For my reader's convenience, I will paste my earlier comment below:

"[Recognition of some future elements in the Revelation while emphasizing the "soon" passages] is not as inconsistent as Geisler imagines, however, and is based on contextual and exegetical considerations in each passage. Nor does the prediction of a near fulfillment of the prophecies in the book necessarily have to apply to every prediction of the book. If a book was, say, 90% concerned with near events, and 10% occupied with distant events, one might justly say that that book should be heeded by the present generation because of the nearness of the fulfillment of its predictions (that is, the vast majority of them)."

If a man finds these comments unpersuasive, he might be expected to refute them, rather than to pretend that they were never written.

As for Hebrews 10:37, Gregg offers only his "opinion" without reasons that it is about A. D. 70, when it is clearly about Christ's Second Coming as both the language and context indicate. For it speaks about our "reward" and "heaven" (vv. 34-35).

My esteemed critic had used Hebrews 10:37 as proof of a point, taking it for granted that we all see this as a reference to the second coming of Christ. I was simply registering my disagreement on this passage, not arguing my point. Geisler had written as if he was unaware of other opinions about this verse, so I informed him of one person who does not follow his assumptions about it.

In my judgment, the reference to "reward in heaven" a couple of verses earlier, is not intended to turn the discussion in Hebrews 10 to the subject of eschatology. It is reflecting back on the convictions that had, at an earlier time, motivated the readers to cheerfully forfeit their earthly estates (i.e., because they knew they had greater rewards in heaven). It is the subject of the suffering believer's rewards in another world, after death—not the second coming of Christ—that is being considered.

Third, if a prediction about an event hundreds of years yet in the future can be relevant to the readers (as Gregg admits about the resurrection/rapture), then there is no reason why distant predictions of how God will defeat evil and bring in everlasting righteousness cannot be relevant to the immediate generation to whom the prophecy was first given. No matter how distant Christ Second Coming is, it is relevant to our lives today, just as the predictions about His First Coming were relevant to Old Testament saints, even though they were made hundreds of years in advance. Paul comforts the Thessalonians with the prediction of the resurrection of loved ones which is already nearly 2000 years later and still not fulfilled (1 Thes. 4:13-18). So, contrary to Gregg, this does not make God a "tease."

I agree that God is no "tease" when He tells us that someday Jesus will come back and right all wrongs. This is the blessed hope of the believer, and everyone that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure. God has not indicated when this shall happen, and it remains always a future hope.

Where it would be difficult not to see God as a "tease" would be if He were to tell suffering Christians in the first century that their enemies will be judged "shortly" and that this is "about to happen" and that the time is "near"—but where he secretly means that this will not occur for over two-thousand years, and that none of this will really have anything to do with their vindication over their present persecutors at all.

Fourth, as for Rev. 22:10, Gregg totally overlooks our point that Daniel’s prediction was not fulfilled in John’s day because John was not told it was fulfilled in his day but only that it could now be understood by those who read it.

It did not strike me as consequential—nor does it now. Sorry.

But even Gregg has to admit this interpretation is “possible,” and his rejection of it is on the subjective grounds that he finds it “unconvincing” and “awkward.”

Yes, I am generous enough to say that some dispensational assumptions are theoretically “possible”—even if I see no probability of their being correct. In this respect, I am far more generous than is my esteemed critic, who does not even acknowledge the possibility of any interpretation other than his own being correct—despite the novelty of his own position in terms of historic Christian beliefs.

Actually, Dr. Geisler cannot possibly know how “subjective” I am being in finding his interpretations “unconvincing” or “awkward,” since I have made no effort to present my reasons. I must assume that he is entirely unfamiliar with my teaching or reasoning methods, apart from the brief comments I made in assessing his arguments.

Fifth, Gregg reveals his hermeneutical colors when he rejects the literal nature of the plagues in Revelation claiming they are “apocalyptic” in contrast to the other similar biblical plagues like those on Pharaoh that were admittedly “historical.” The root problem with preterism, of both kinds, is the rejection of a consistent application of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.

I do not reject “a consistent application of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.” What I reject is “a consistent application of the literal method of interpretation.” We could save ourselves many tedious keystrokes if this “literal” red herring could be eliminated from the discussion.

It is frustrating that Dr. Geisler presents a digest of my comments without their context, making it sound as if I had not already anticipated this objection. These are my previous remarks, to which he is responding:

“The reason one can take the plagues of Egypt literally and those in Revelation figuratively is that these are two very different kinds of literature. Exodus is a historical narrative, whereas Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy. The former genre is expected to use literal language to describe historical events; the latter uses symbolism, which echo significant historical events (like the plagues of Egypt) in order to get across its message.”

My esteemed critic is right in saying that I reveal my hermeneutical colors here. That is because I am forthright in explaining what hermeneutic I am employing, and how it is justified. The only difference between Dr. Geisler and myself, in this respect, is that he never honestly reveals his hermeneutical colors. To please fellow dispensationalists, he professes loyalty to a “literal” hermeneutic, but when it comes to actually interpreting specific non-literal biblical phrases and imagery, he (like every sensible person) proceeds to interpret non-literally, as common sense would often dictate. He and I follow essentially similar hermeneutic procedures (with incidental differences). Unlike me, he simply gives his hermeneutical commitments a deceptive label.

Amazingly, Gregg believes that in the same “Olivet Discourse” there are many “genres [which] call for a different hermeneutic.” Indeed, he suggests there are three different

hermeneutics in this one passage—part is “literal language, part is apocalyptic language, and part is parabolic”! No wonder preterism engenders such confusion.

Let me get this straight...preterism engenders confusion because its advocates see value in recognizing differences between widely-differing genres in literature?

It is disconcerting to hear the Dean of a Christian institution of higher education, admitting that he thinks it confusion-engendering to engage in the basic hermeneutical task of genre identification. What kind of scholars must such institutions produce, if their students are discouraged from identifying the genre of the material they are seeking to interpret, for fear that they might find such a discipline “confusing”?

Of course, every intelligent person recognizes many genre distinctions intuitively, so that different canons of interpretation are instinctively applied to historical reporting, poetry, technical writing, fictional novels, etc. Geisler himself certainly must recognize these distinctions, in his general reading, else he would be forced to reach conclusions about certain passages that even he would recognize as absurd.

It has not been my experience or observation that preterism engenders more confusion than does dispensationalism. I believe there are a greater variety of opinions in the latter camp than in the former. As for the confusing nature of my criticized comments, here they are, pasted directly from my earlier response:

“As for the question of how one can be consistent in taking part of the Olivet Discourse literally, and part non-literally, I think I addressed that above: part of the discourse is literal language, part is apocalyptic language, and part is parabolic. Each of these genres call for a different hermeneutic, but it is not really confusing, but actually more or less intuitive, once the separate genres are identified.”

My esteemed critic finds it possible only to ridicule this paragraph. Apparently, offering a refutation would be asking too much. I pointed out that the discourse in Matthew (like similar passages in the Old Testament prophets) has much in it that can be understood literally (e.g., predictions of persecution, wars, false messiahs and false prophets), and that a few verses are expressed in an apocalyptic style, characteristic of many prophetic passages. The third genre is that of the five parables at the end of chapter 24 and all of chapter 25. Is there anything faulty with my observations here? If I have represented the case correctly, why ridicule my statement? Is my esteemed critic saying that he applies the same “literal” hermeneutic to the parables at the end as he does to the events predicted earlier in the discourse? Does he take the ten virgins as ten literal women? If so, how does he justify such counterintuitive “consistency”?

Sixth, like other preterist[s] Gregg has difficulty with the fact that many of the earliest Fathers rejected this view.

Actually, I have no difficulty with this at all. Why does Dr. Geisler say that I do? The writings of the fathers, to which he refers, disagree with his view as well as with mine. Does my esteemed critic “have difficulty” with that fact (other than the difficulty he finds in acknowledging it, I mean)?

Indeed, Ireaneus who knew the apostle John’s disciple Polycarp rejected preterism, as did Victorinus and Eusebius after him. . Likewise, for his own private anti-patristic and allegoristic interpretation of these events, he dismissed a continuous strain of Fathers from

just after the apostles through the fourth century who were opposed to preterism.

What could be more disingenuous than for a dispensationalist to make this criticism? The same fathers who (as my esteemed critic puts it) “rejected preterism” and “were opposed to preterism” (as though Geisler thinks they had heard of preterism, weighed it and found it wanting!) had precisely the same “opposition” to dispensationalism. They had never heard of either viewpoint. Does saying nothing about a topic of which one has never heard constitute “rejecting”?

Dr. Geisler will not permit preterists to think independently of the church fathers on the subject of the Book of Revelation, while he and other dispensationalists utterly ignore or reject the teachings of the same early fathers on many major eschatological issues! My esteemed critic himself dismisses that “continuous strain of Fathers from just after the apostles through the fourth century” whose unambiguous teachings included “replacement theology,” the future persecution of the church by antichrist, the predicted rise of the “Lawless One” immediately upon the fall of the Roman Empire, and many other non-dispensational positions. For reasons not disclosed, Dr. Geisler gives himself permission to disagree with these fathers. The only reason he thinks it audacious of me to disagree with them is that I also happen to disagree with him.

(Incidentally, Eusebius, whom Geisler mentions above, was an amillennialist, and minced no words in condemning premillennialism as “heresy.”)

Seventh, Gregg points to early signs of apostasy in the NT as evidence against the argument that John wrote Revelation late. But this overlooks several important facts. There was nearly a generation between the time of Christ and the apostasy that characterized the church of Paul’s, Peter’s, and Jude’s epistles. Likewise, there is nearly another generation between the 60s and Domitian’s reign under which John wrote. Despite local problems earlier, the general character of the churches in Revelation differs significantly from those before A.D. 70.

This argument seems to be saying that the churches addressed in Revelation required about a generation from their founding to leave their first love and to become lukewarm and compromised. He says that I have “overlooked” the fact that it took Paul’s churches a generation to get into trouble. I overlooked no such thing. In fact, I directly refuted it. It did not take a generation (or even a year!) for the churches at Galatia and Corinth to get themselves into errors every bit as serious as those of the churches addressed in Revelation. I pointed this out in my previous response. My esteemed critic apparently “overlooked” it.

Eighth, Gregg speaks against the literal interpretation as “a low view of prophecy” that claims a “prophet cannot discuss future developments before they arise.” Yet he seems blissfully unaware that this is precisely what the preterist[s] do with Matthew 24-25 and the bulk of the Book of Revelation.

I never made any such statement about the “literal interpretation” of prophecy, and it is perplexing to try to imagine how Dr. Geisler came to think that I did. My comments were not part of our discussion of literal interpretation, but we were discussing the date of writing of the Book of Revelation.

My esteemed critic, in his earlier criticism of Hank, had advanced the theory that imperial persecutions did not occur prior to Domitian’s reign as an argument for the late date of Revelation. I responded that this argument (which has nothing to do with literalism) reflected a “low view of prophecy.” This is because this particular argument for the late date depends entirely on the assumption that Revelation cannot be predictive. It is similar to the fallacious argument that Isaiah

could not have written about Cyrus before that man was born.

Dr. Geisler does not seem to have noticed that he was repeating a late-date argument for Revelation that only works for non-evangelical non-futurists (he is both an evangelical and a futurist). Here is how this common argument goes:

1. Revelation is describing the current situation in John's own day (not a future situation);
2. Revelation 13 describes the Imperial persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire;
3. There was no such empire-wide persecution prior to Domitian;
4. Therefore John is describing the Domitianic persecutions;

Therefore, (based upon the non-evangelical assumption that John could not possibly be describing events that had not yet materialized)—

5. John could not have written during Nero's reign, nor any time earlier Domitian's persecutions.

The problem with Geisler's use of this classic liberal argument is that he personally only accepts points 3 and 5. As a futurist, he does not believe points 1, 2 or 4 (without which, point 5 does not follow as a necessary conclusion). Dispensationalists believe that the "beast" is a future individual—not the Roman emperor who was contemporary with John—so they cannot use this argument at all. My esteemed critic appears to have parroted an (incidentally invalid) argument from the textbooks of people who reject his position, without first checking to see whether the argument works for his viewpoint.

My original point was that those who do use this argument (namely those who think Revelation 13 is about the Domitianic persecutions) to prove that Revelation could not have been written earlier than Domitian's time, are making non-evangelical assumptions—namely that John could not have written prophetically about a future Domitianic persecution 25 years prior to its occurrence (say, in A.D. 69). This assumes that Revelation cannot contain actual predictive prophecies. Such an argument should be rejected by all evangelicals, along with the similarly-reasoned argument that Daniel could not have been written before the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, since Daniel wrote about him.

If my esteemed critic would like to show how this argument works without invoking the non-evangelical assumptions mentioned above, I would be very interested in hearing his logic.

Ninth, Gregg dismisses the cumulative weight of ten arguments for the late date of Revelation (which strongly opposes preterism), using statements like "How do we know?" "This is not self-evident" and "This is as subjective as the previous point." But he provides no definitive response to any objection or to the overall weight of all the objections to an early date for Revelation.

Again, to say I find the arguments to be fallacious and unconvincing is not the same thing as "dismiss[ing]" them without consideration. My esteemed critic makes it sound as if I give ten solid arguments a cavalier dismissal, when in fact, I addressed the weakness of each argument and recommended, for a fuller treatment of the same arguments, the introduction of my book and also Kenneth Gentry's). Contra Dr. Geisler's suggestion, ten fallacious arguments do not add up to one strong argument. My esteemed opponent would recognize this fact instinctively, were he presented with ten flimsy arguments for, say, the "documentary hypothesis." A value of zero-times-ten is still

zero.

And, unlike the futurists view, preterism is completely dependent on an early date for the Book of Revelation. Hence, the strong evidence for a late date for Revelation (after A.D. 70) is a strong argument against preterism.

I have always acknowledged that the greatest weakness of the preterist position is its absolute dependence upon the early date of writing for Revelation. While neither the early nor the late date can be proven beyond question, yet the arguments for the late date are not compelling, and the abundance of good peripheral arguments in favor of preterism tend to add additional weight to the already adequate case for an early date.

Tenth, he wrongly argues that several possible literal interpretations of a passages, as futurists have of some texts, is justification for preterists taking different allegorical interpretations of these literal events. This is an insightful example of a false analogy.

I sought no such justification. I was simply turning my esteemed critic's argument back on himself. He seemed to imply that the diversity of opinions among preterists indicates the invalidity of the general position. I merely pointed out that there is an even higher degree of disagreement among dispensationalists. I was not seeking a "justification" for using an "allegorical interpretation." I was saying that what Dr. Geisler thinks disqualifies preterism (i.e., differences of opinions among its advocates) would equally disqualify dispensationalism. However, I don't think that either view is disqualified by the variety of opinions held among its advocates. If one view or another is to be disqualified, it must be on the basis of scriptural exegesis.

As a sidebar: neither I, nor any modern amillennialist or preterist, ever employ what can properly be called an "allegorical" interpretation of any passage in order to establish our eschatology. Dispensationalists (apparently perpetuating this mistake by merely quoting each other) have continually referred to the approach of amillennialists as the "allegorizing" hermenteutic, known to be characteristic of Origen's writings (whom they decry as unorthodox).

I should have thought they would be better informed. "Allegorizing" is a specific approach to scriptural stories that was taken by many rabbis, by Philo, and (in the Christian movement) by members of the Alexandrian School, like Origen. This approach actually bears no resemblance to any method followed by any modern evangelical scholar in establishing doctrine.

Dispensationalists are so committed to asserting their loyalty to a "literal" hermeneutic, that they apparently have not familiarized themselves with the variety of ways in which a passage can be taken non-literally. The allegorical method was certainly one non-literal approach among many, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with preterist or amillennial methodologies.

When we read that a sower sowed seeds, and then learn that the story was not about literal seeds, but that seeds were symbolic of the word of God being preached, we are interpreting the story non-literally. But this is not the allegorical method. It is parable—a different non-literal way of speaking, commonly employed by the prophets and by Jesus.

When we read, in Revelation, that the whole world worships an animal having seven heads and ten horns, which eventually makes war against a Lamb, and then we later learn that the animal is not an animal at all, nor are the heads really heads but mountains, nor are the horns really horns, but kings, nor is the Lamb actually a literal lamb—we realize that we are again reading non-literal material, and will err if we interpret literally. But this is neither allegory nor parable, but

apocalyptic symbolism.

Yet another form of non-literal interpretation, legitimized by its appearance in the writings of the New Testament, is “typological” interpretation. The recollection of Israel’s exodus from Egypt (in Hosea 11:1) is seen, by Matthew, as “fulfilled” in the coming of the infant Jesus out of Egypt—apparently recognizing Israel’s experience as a “type” of the Messiah’s. There is no way that this can be said to be a “literal” interpretation of Hosea 11:1. It is typological.

When we read, in Isaiah, that God will lay in Zion a foundation stone, and then we read, in 1 Peter 2:6, that this is not referring to a stone at all, but that it refers to Jesus, and the “Zion” of which He is “the foundation” is not the literal mountain in Israel, but is the church—again we find we are dealing with non-literal language and should interpret non-literally. This, however, is not a case of parable, allegory or apocalyptic, but the stone and Zion are understood “spiritually.” Thus we are expected to “spiritualize” the passage, as did the New Testament writers:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven...” (Hebrews 12:22-23)

“Allegorizing” is an entirely different method from those surveyed above. In many cases, the allegorist sees, in a simple story, many seemingly unrelated and unwarranted philosophical correspondences. Some examples of the kind of allegorization practiced by some Jewish teachers of Jesus’ day are given in the Jewish Encyclopedia:

“Men versed in natural philosophy explain the history of Abraham and Sarah in an allegorical manner with no inconsiderable ingenuity and propriety. The man here [Abraham] is a symbolical expression for the virtuous mind, and by his wife is meant virtue, for the name of his wife is Sarah [“princess”], because there is nothing more royal or more worthy of regal preeminence than virtue” (“De Abrahamo,” xx. 8; ed. Mangey, ii. 15).

“[Josephus’] symbolical exposition of the Tabernacle with its utensils, and of the high priest’s vestments (“Ant.” iii. 7, § 7), and his interpretation that the Holy of Holies means the heavens, the showbread means the twelve months, and the candlestick means the seven planets, resemble Philo, but are merely resemblances. Similar explanations are repeatedly given by the Midrash...”

“The following is an illustration [of Philo’s allegorizations] from Genesis: ‘God planted a garden in Eden [Gen. ii. 5 et seq.]: that means God implants terrestrial virtue in the human race. The tree of life is that specific virtue which some people call goodness. The river that ‘went out of Eden’ is also generic goodness. Its four heads are the cardinal virtues; ‘Pheison’ is derived from the Greek ???????? (I abstain) and means ‘prudence’; and, being an illustrious virtue, it is said ‘to compass the whole land of Havilah where there is gold.’” The name “Gihon” means “chest” (see Gen. R. on the passage) and stands for courage, and it compasses Ethiopia, or humiliation. Tigris is “temperance”; the name is connected with a tiger because it resolutely opposes desire. Euphrates means “fertility” (Hebrew parah; see Gen. R.) and stands for “justice.” In this way the patriarchs, however, are allegorized away into mere abstractions (“De Allegoriis Legum,” i. 19 et seq.; ed. Mangey, i. 56 et seq.).”

(above examples from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1256&letter=A>)

Some ancient Christian writers—notably those of the Alexandrian School, like Origen—also employed a similar allegorizing method. However, no modern biblical exegete follows such a method, to my knowledge.

Milder forms of allegorizing were not unknown among the apostolic writings. Paul allegorized the

story of Ishmael and Isaac—making their mothers to represent the two covenants, and the boys to represent the unbelieving Jews and the Christians, respectively (Galatians 4:22-31). He also took the law of not muzzling the ox and applied it allegorically to the rights of ministers, as though this were its primary meaning in the original law (1 Cor.9:9-10/ 1 Tim.5:17-18). He seems also to allegorize the law that forbids plowing with an ox and an ass together, when he writes: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor.6:14). However, these cases did not follow such an arbitrary approach as did Philo and Origen. Paul’s practice simply saw a spiritual principle in the Old Testament example, and applied the same principle to New Testament truth.

Preterists and amillennialists, as well as dispensationalists, take many things non-literally, but I have never encountered an example of allegorizing in any of their theological polemics. Dispensationalists are fond of linking the amillennialists’ hermeneutics to “the allegorizing method of the non-orthodox Origen.” In continually making this association, dispensationalists demonstrate either their lack of familiarity with the hermeneutics of the evangelical amillennialist, or unfamiliarity with those of Origen—probably both.

Eleventh, it is amusing that Gregg uses a third century heretical teacher, Origen, as a basis for his amillennial view and dismisses earlier second century orthodox Fathers as a basis for futurism... He summarily dismisses all this with a vague “for all anyone can say” and a guilt-by-association with the Word of Faith movement!

It would be interesting to discover where Geisler finds me using Origen as a basis for my amillennial view. My amillennialism was established by scriptural exegesis before I had ever heard of Origen. There is no place in my teaching or writing that would suggest that I use Origen as a basis for any of my views. The fact that my esteemed critic thinks I have done so only shows the carelessness with which he is willing to handle the statements of those who disagree with him.

My comparison of Pseudo-Ephraem with Origen was neither invalid nor particularly “amusing.” My point: One could as easily prove that the early church was amillennial by appeal to the controversial Origen as to prove that the early church believed in a pre-trib rapture by appeal to the questionable “Pseudo-Ephraem.” I call Pseudo-Ephraem “questionable” for a number of reasons.

Scholars are not agreed that the Syrian, Ephraem of Nisibis, of the fourth century, wrote this document—which is why they call it “Pseudo-Ephraem.”

Even if this sermon was indeed written by Ephraem, in the third century, and even if he did teach a two-stage coming of Christ (both of which are debatable), the document’s teaching does not appear to reflect the same eschatological opinion as that of the other contemporary fathers. In other words, Ephraem (like Darby, 1400 years later) may well have espoused his own idiosyncratic opinions, contrary to the classic teachings of the mainstream church.

My comparison with the Word of Faith teaching was not intended as a gratuitous insult, but as an apt analogy. If a book by Kenneth Hagin were to be discovered by scholars a thousand years from now, it would be a mistake on their part to assume that this book had represented the majority view of the church in the twentieth century.

That was the simple point I was making. It did not even remotely resemble a case of “guilt by association.” There was, in my remark, no suggestion of guilt, nor any element of association. The fact that my esteemed critic thought of it that way raises serious questions about either his willingness or his ability to understand a simple argument.

Further, contrary to Gregg, Renald Showers (in Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!) has

demonstrated that the very earliest Fathers believed in an imminent coming of Christ, not just the fourth century Ephraem.

It's a little late in the game for dispensationalists to try to prove such a point by appeal to "the earliest Fathers," unless some new "Fathers" have been dug up that are not in my 32-volume set of their writings. It has been abundantly demonstrated by scholars studying these same fathers that they believed the Roman Empire had yet to fall and the Man of Lawlessness was yet to arise and persecute the church. There is no way that a man can believe such things and also be teaching that the actual second coming is imminent (a word meaning, "something that could happen at any moment").

This is to say nothing of the inspired writings of the NT which proclaim Christ's imminent return repeatedly (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 15:51-53; 16:22; Phil. 3:20-21; 4:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 1:10; 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:9, 23; 2 Thes. 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jas. 5:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 1 Jn. 2:28-3:2; Jude 21; Rev. 2:25; 3:10; 22:7, 12, 20). Passages like "The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5) and "the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas.5:8) can hardly mean anything other than imminent, unless one is a full preterist and denies a literal future Second Coming, claiming Christ returned in the first century."

Many of the verses cited (though perhaps not all) do refer to a future coming of Christ. But what words or phrases in any of them suggest that Christ might come at any minute? Appeal to the actual words in a proof-text is an essential aspect of biblical argumentation—an aspect too frequently neglected in dispensational polemics. The presentation of the actual biblical words that allegedly support his point (if such words exist) would be helpful in establishing its validity.

If the apostles believed that Jesus could come at any moment, as Dr. Geisler is suggesting, then why did Paul so vehemently deny it in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3?

Twelfth, after rejecting the early Fathers who were opposed to preterism, Gregg inconsistently appeals to the early Fathers to justify his amillennial views. He speaks of the pretrib beliefs before Ephraem in the fourth century as unsupported by earlier Fathers. Yet, he criticizes futurist who use the early Fathers to support their view.

Appeal to church fathers is a tricky business. Everybody appeals to them when doing so supports their views, and everybody reserves the right to disagree with them when in disagreement with their views. I simply appeal to the amillennialism of certain early fathers to counter the dispensationalist' false assertions that the early church was uniformly premillennial. I am making no other point. I would not suggest that the agreement of these fathers proves amillennialism to be correct. My opinions do not depend upon the writings of the church fathers, but upon more primitive and inerrant authorities.

Thirteenth, he rejects the dispensational belief in a literal restoration of Israel which is firmly based in the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture (see Geisler, *ibid.*, chap. 15). Yet he claims to hold the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

That a belief in the future restoration of ethnic Israel is a necessary result of consistently following the grammatical-historical method of interpretation is merely one opinion. Luther and Calvin both advocated the grammatical-historical method, and neither saw in scripture any basis for such a restoration of the nation Israel. Stating an opinion is not the same thing as presenting a reasoned rebuttal. I reserve the right to continue to disagree with dispensational belief on this matter (without the slightest embarrassment) until a satisfactory rebuttal is forthcoming.

Fourteenth, Gregg makes the shocking statement that “to spiritualize the first resurrection may indeed be a violation of some arbitrary, humanly devise[d] ‘literal...method of interpretation,’ but what of it?” First of all, the literal method is not humanly devised nor arbitrary. It is an undeniable method of interpretation since one cannot deny it without using it.

Since there are various methods of interpretation other than the literal, and since no biblical writer tells us that we must use the literal approach at all times (in fact, the biblical writers themselves neglect it as often as not), I think it not inappropriate to call the dispensationalist’s demand that we use no other method to be a “man-made” rule. If the rule was not made by men, then who made it—God? Can my esteemed critic, or anyone else, point out where God communicated such a rule for the interpretation of scripture? If such a rule has no divine sanction, then why would it be inappropriate (“shocking”) to describe the rule as “man-made”? If the rule does have divine sanction, can anyone explain why the apostles felt justified in their frequent violation of it?

So, the literal method of interpretation is literally undeniable. Here again, the root problem of preterism is laid bare. To use its own word, their interpretations of prophesy [sic] “spiritualize” a lot of prophecy. Incredibly, Gregg brushes off the inconsistency of taking one resurrection literally in the same passage which uses the same words to describe both resurrections by appealing to another passage in a different context that is talking about regeneration (Eph. 2:1), not resurrection.

I must wonder whether my esteemed critic even attempts to understand an argument before seeking to answer it. The point I made was that Paul (like Jesus—John 5:24), without using the actual word “resurrection,” often speaks of regeneration in the language of resurrection—“you who were dead...he has made alive” and “have passed from death unto life.” Regeneration was thus described, by Jesus and Paul, as a sort of spiritual resurrection, or a resurrection “in Christ”—using the same terminology that is commonly used of the physical resurrection.

This is what amillennialists believe John’s “first resurrection” (Rev.20:5-6) is referring to. There is nothing irrational or inconsistent about such a conclusion, even if my esteemed critic doesn’t agree with it. Dr. Geisler himself asserts that Revelation 20:11-13 describes a “resurrection,” even though he admits that the word “resurrection” is not used there.

Even more strangely, he uses another text which is speaking about two literal resurrections (Jn. 5:28f) of the “dead” bodies “in the graves” which will “come forth” at the command of Christ to justify that there is only one physical resurrection.

Even more strangely, my esteemed critic thinks that John 5:28f speak of two separate physical resurrections, divided by an interim of 1007 years—despite the fact that the referenced passage places the resurrection of “those who have done good” and of “those who have done evil” in the same “hour.” What then has become of literal interpretation?

He ignores the sound exegesis of George Ladd (in *The Blessed Hope*), who is not a dispensationalist, but who demonstrates that Revelation 20 is speaking about two literal resurrections. Indeed, the very historical-grammatical hermeneutic which Gregg claims to embrace demands such an interpretation.

I have read and carefully considered Ladd’s treatment of Revelation 20—in three of his books. I have not “ignored” his exegesis. I simply believe it is flawed—dispensationalist or not. One does not have to be a dispensationalist to be wrong.

My esteemed critic is in the habit of saying that someone who is not impressed with arguments for his positions has “ignored” or “dismissed” those arguments. I have never encountered a preterist teacher who is ignorant of the arguments for dispensationalism. Many preterists, like myself, have themselves come out of a background of teaching dispensationalism for many years, and those who were never into that theology have usually studied dispensational writings extensively and prove their acquaintance with them by their precise interaction with the arguments of the opposing view.

Such cannot be said about most of the dispensationalists I have encountered—including, apparently, my esteemed opponent in this debate. It would be truly refreshing to encounter a dispensationalist who actually has taken the effort to understand what is being said by those taking the historically-held view of scripture (amillennialism).

Fifteenth...To show how blinded one can be by his own hermeneutical presuppositions, Gregg claims “there is no meaning of Revelation 20 plainer than the amillennial one.”

My actual statement, in context, speaks for itself. What I wrote was:

“However, once one has become free from the constraints of an arbitrary, literalistic, dispensational hermeneutic, and is at liberty to let scripture interpret scripture, there is no meaning of Revelation 20 plainer than the amillennial one.”

Where, in this statement, is the “blindness” to which my esteemed critic refers?

Nothing could be further from the fact, since the same phrase “lived again” is used by the same author in the same text, one before and one after the “thousand years.” And Gregg admits it is a literal resurrection.

Yes, I do admit that the living again after the thousand years is referring to the physical resurrection. However, the word Dr. Geisler translates as “lived again” is best translated simply as “lived,” sometimes having the connotation of “living-on,” or continuing to live, and other times suggesting the concept of “living again.” Apart from Revelation 20, there are two other occurrences in Revelation of this verb, in the same tense, one of which could be translated “lived again” or “came to life” (2:8), and one which can most reasonably be translated “lived-on” (13:14). I take the word in the latter sense in Revelation 20:4, and in the former sense in Revelation 20:5. Why would this be more inconsistent than taking the same word one way in Revelation 2:8 and another in Revelation 13:14?

Further, the two resurrections are said to be separated by “a thousand years,” a term used six times in five verses. Finally, the “thousand years” has a beginning and an end that is “finished.” The bookends of this literal time period are said to be two different literal events, one of which is called “the first resurrection.” Oddly enough, the amills take this to be the spiritual one (when the term “resurrection” is never used spiritually in the NT), and the other resurrection (which is not even called that as such) they believe is the literal resurrection.

For unexplained reasons, my esteemed critic keeps inserting the word “literal” where the text does not. It would be legitimate for him to say, “I take these references literally,” but it is quite another thing to say, “the texts says there will be a literal such-and-such.” Dr. Geisler asserts that the time period is “literal” and that the bookends around it are “two different literal events.” This is another instance of mere assertion, not argumentation from evidence. Argumentation requires the presentation of evidence for one’s position regarding the disputed point. Mere assertion provides

no evidence. It simply “begs the question”—that is, it assumes as a starting point for an argument the very thing that is under dispute in the debate.

An example of this begging the question is the parenthetical remark, “Oddly enough, the amills take this to be the spiritual one (when the term ‘resurrection’ is never used spiritually in the NT).” To avoid begging the question, the parenthetical clause should read, “when the term ‘resurrection’ is never used spiritually ELSEWHERE in the NT.” This would present his point in its proper light. The reader is then left to assess whether the absence of other uses of “resurrection” non-physically in the New Testament is likely (or not) to determine whether it is used thus in the Book of Revelation—a book which breaks many precedents in usage (e.g., where else, but in Revelation 11:8, is Jerusalem ever called “Egypt?”).

However, as observed earlier, the same word “resurrection” (anastasis) is in fact used of a non-physical resurrection, in Luke 2:34.

What is most striking about Geisler’s paragraph, above, is that he is willing to take the reference to the dead being summoned to the great white throne as synonymous with a second “resurrection” (though that word, as he admits, is not used there), but he is not willing to allow amillennialists to see references to “passing from death unto life” (John 5:24) or of our being “made alive” from the “dead” (Ephesians 2:1) as synonyms for “the first resurrection”—upon the grounds that the word “resurrection” is not used in Ephesians 2 or in John 5:24. Either the dead rising is the same thing as “resurrection,” or it is not. It can’t be so for the dispensationalist without permitting it to be so for alternative views as well.

And perish the thought of what the preterist could do with the historicity of early Genesis or of the Gospels if they would ever become consistent with their allegorical interpretation!

Amen to that! Any preterist who would inflexibly adhere to the same hermeneutic, regardless of the genre of the passages considered, would be making the same basic error as do the dispensationalists. Fortunately, preterists are not chained to an artificial rule that requires them to apply the same standards of interpretation, regardless what the author’s chosen means of communication may have been. Those of us who are unwilling to allow the dispensationalists to impose artificial rules upon us are free to think clearly enough to adopt the proper hermeneutic to fit the respective genres found in scripture.

Sixteenth, to borrow his own term, Gregg becomes “dislodged from reality” by denying that “orthodoxy is dependant on a proper literal...interpretation of the Bible.” How one can consistently hold orthodox theology on any other basis[?] Take for example the unquestioned orthodox belief in the literal death and literal resurrection of Christ. How can one derive this from Scripture with anything but a proper literal interpretation of Scripture? And yet by the same non-literal method of interpreting prophecy used by preterist, one would have to deny the orthodox teaching of the literal death and resurrection of Christ.

Yes, “by the same non-literal method of interpreting prophecy,” one would have to deny the orthodox teaching of the literal death and resurrection of Christ—but preterists do not apply the same non-literal method when interpreting historical narrative as they use in interpreting poetic and symbolic statements. Can anyone say why they should?

In point of fact, full preterism is doctrinally unorthodox and partial preterism is methodologically unorthodox.

In fairness, this sentence should have begun with the words, “In the narrow opinion of one man...”

instead of the presumptuous phrase, “In point of fact...”

Seventeenth, one cannot help but be amazed at the audacity of some preterists. Gregg actually charges that I have not read the “majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity.” How does he know this? In fact, I have read all of them and virtually all of their published writings.

Dr. Geisler took greater offense than was called for by my remarks. In his original article against Hank Hanegraaff, Geisler was saying that Hank was out of line in neglecting “...the historical-grammatical interpretation of all of Scripture, including prophecy, and amply exhibited in the majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity”.

My remark was: “Geisler should actually read ‘the majority of writers in the earliest centuries of Christianity’ before he tries to pretend that they employed the literalistic method of interpretation that he advocates!”

If Dr. Geisler thinks that the early fathers employed the same hermeneutic that he uses in interpreting Old Testament prophecy, then he must not have read them very attentively, for he gives no evidence that he is familiar with their hermeneutical methods.

Further, I never asserted that they all employed a consistent “literalistic method” of interpretation, as Gregg alleges. I only contented that many of them, some of whom were close to the apostles, rejected the inconsistent partial preterist methodology.

Notice my esteemed critic’s admission that the early fathers did not consistently employ the very hermeneutic rule that dispensationalists wish to impose as the only “orthodox” hermeneutic.

The “partial preterist methodology” should not be accused of being “inconsistent” until it has at least been analyzed and comprehended. This would require a degree of objectivity that may not be available to the theological ideologue. I do not get the impression that Geisler knows what the “partial preterist methodology” entails, since he keeps making the mistake of referring to it as “allegorizing.” There may be a consistency underlying the preterist’s methodology that is missed by one who is reading and thinking in a shallow manner—looking only to find ammunition against the view.

Eighteenth, Gregg dismisses a massive array of unconditional promises that are based on the historical-grammatical interpretation which says that there will be a literal restoration of ethnic Israel to their land (see our Systematic Theology, vol. 4, chaps.14-16). None of the passages he cites deny this future for Israel, and numerous passages he does not cite affirm that there will be one (Gen. 12-17; 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 89; Mt. 19:28; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 3:19; Rom. 11, and many more).

It makes little sense to speak of the “massive array of unconditional promises” made to Israel, when God Himself declares that He makes no unconditional promises to any nation (Jer.18:7-10). Where does my esteemed critic find God contradicting Himself and saying that the promises to Israel are unconditional? There were many times that God stated the conditions attached to the land promises (e.g., Lev.18:26-28/ Deut.28:15, 21; 30:17-18). Just because God did not repeat the conditions every time He repeated the promises does not mean that He had forgotten that they were conditional, nor that Israel should imagine this to be the case.

We have it on good authority that the Old Testament promises have all been fulfilled, long before any of us were around. The ones that were not yet fulfilled before Christ came were fulfilled in

Christ. The denial of this fact on the part of dispensationalism bespeaks a low Christology (compared to that of historic Christianity), for which they try to compensate with a high Israelology.

Historic Christianity, until dispensationalism, held to a high Christology, and taught that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything that God had promised to Israel's ancestors. This is stated often in the New Testament. Dispensationalism has a different idea of what God promised to Israel—namely: Jesus, plus real estate with a view of the Mediterranean. Jesus alone is not enough for Israel—though He is supposed to be enough for the rest of us.

If the verses my esteemed critic lists above are the best ones he has to prove that Israel is promised a return to her land in the end times, then this will demonstrate the weakness of his position, since none of them speak of the Jews returning to their land at any future time. Those who escaped from Egypt with Moses were given a fine piece of real estate, from the time of Joshua (1400 BC?) until the Assyrian conquest, in 722 BC. The Judeans were given even longer, finally being removed in AD 70. As Moses predicted, they did not fulfill the conditions for permanent residency, and so it was taken away from them. All of this was predicted by Moses and the prophets, as well as by Jesus. After AD 70, no promises were made of a later restoration.

I have no interest in the question of whether or not ethnic Israel will be regathered into their land. If they wish to go there, they have my blessing (not that they desire it), though I think they are safer almost anywhere else in the world. I wish them well. I have never denied that most Jews may someday migrate there. It may also be that all Samoans will someday migrate to Sweden—though I have not heard anyone predicting it, and it would have no greater biblical significance than would all the Jews moving to Israel.

Though I don't claim to know the future, I think both scenarios are unlikely, since Samoans are more acclimated to the tropics and most of the world's Jews appear to have better sense than to put themselves unnecessarily in harm's way.

So strongly are these texts in favor of a literal restoration of the land and throne promises to ethnic Israel that even some non-premills like Vern Poythress and Anthony Hoekema have been forced to acknowledge such a future for Israel.

Are we supposed to take our theological cues from a couple of reformed theologians? My esteemed critic doesn't do so. Why should I? I have so much better authorities to consult—namely, Jesus and the New Testament writers.

And not to see that Paul is speaking of ethnic Israel in Romans 9-11 (which he calls Israel "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:2) to whom God gave "the covenants" and "Promises" (9:4) is a bold act of exegetical blindness. And it is this same "Israel" in this same passage of which Paul says they will be "grafted into their own olive tree" (11:24) because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (11:29).

I know of no one who fails to see ethnic Israel in Paul's references to his "kinsmen after the flesh"—nor do I myself engage in such a "bold act of exegetical blindness" as this. However, I do like to take Paul's words in context, so that I do not quote only the part of the passage that says, "they will be grafted into their own olive tree" (Rom.11:24) divorced from the previously-stated condition: "...if they do not remain in unbelief" (Rom.11:23).

"The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable" is not an absolute statement. God gave Mount Seir to Edom (Deut.2:5), then took it away, and Edom is now extinct (Ezek.35:3, 7, 15). God gave

Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians the rule over all nations (Dan.2:37; 5:18), but took that away also, giving it then to the Medes and the Persians (Dan.5:20, 28). God gave Israel a conditional land grant, and then took it away because of their breach of covenant. These are historical and biblical facts. Some “gifts” of God are revocable.

In Romans 11, “the gifts and callings” are clearly intended to mean the fulfillment of the promises to those who are the “called” ones, which is the burden of Paul’s entire discussion in chapters 9 through 11. In Romans 9:24, he identifies the “called” ones, not as the nation of Israel, but as a larger and more diverse group, “not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” Can this be describing anyone other than the Church of Jesus Christ?

Ironic as it may seem, a fundamental problem with reformed amillennialism is that it does not believe in unconditional election—at least not for Israel!

I’ll let the Reformed amillennialists sort out their own inconsistencies. As for me, I don’t believe in “unconditional” election of anyone except Christ Himself. For all others, there is the condition of being found “in Christ”—the elect One.

As for the clear literal truth that Jesus will literally come again with his literal twelve disciples who sit on twelve literal thrones and reign over the literal “twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19:28), the best Gregg can offer is “the suggestions” that “this is not the only way in which Matt. 19:28 can be interpreted.”

There’s a lot of “literal” in that sentence which are not found in any scripture. Perhaps my esteemed critic is simply offering his “suggestions.”

... that “this is not the only way in which Matt. 19:28 can be interpreted.” Of course, it isn’t; there is the spiritualistic way Gregg interprets it as “a present reality.” But this is certainly not the result of the historical grammatical hermeneutic preterists profess to accept.

I not only “profess to accept” the historical grammatical hermeneutic, but I endeavor to be extremely loyal to it in my studies of scripture—notwithstanding Dr. Geisler’s denials. I strongly suspect that my esteemed critic neither knows nor understands by what hermeneutical route anyone other than dispensationalists reach their conclusions—and he does not appear to be obsessed with learning or understanding such things. But then, why should he care? Dispensationalist academics, who are salaried at dispensational colleges, need not know why anyone else thinks differently from themselves. As long as they keep preaching to their own choir, no one will know or care how minimal is their grasp of the arguments of any other viewpoint.

Nor is his contention that Jesus “unambiguously” established His kingdom at His first coming, as any literal understanding of numerous passages reveals (see Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:6-8; 3:19-21; Rom. 11:11-36).

I think I have said enough to establish my rejection of the dispensationalists’ rule that scripture must always be interpreted literally (a rule which they do not follow any more consistently than I do). There is nothing in the scriptures Geisler lists, whether taken literally or not, that tells us whether or not Jesus established His kingdom at His first coming, though my esteemed critic seems to think that something in them addresses that point.

The first referenced passage speaks of the status of the twelve apostles “in the regeneration” (that is, the present, New Covenant salvation—Titus 3:5).

The second passage speaks of “restor[ing] the kingdom to Israel,” but presents only a question raised by the somewhat benighted disciples on that subject. No information is affirmed about the kingdom by Jesus, in this passage.

The third speaks of “times of refreshing” being sent upon those in Israel who would repent, without making reference to the kingdom at all.

The fourth lengthy passage speaks of God’s plan of redemption for Israel (which is the same as His plan of redemption for everyone else, as those verses make clear). The kingdom is not mentioned. There is no mention here (or elsewhere) of the postponement of the kingdom’s establishment.

Most of these verses speak of Israel, but not the establishment of the kingdom. Also, none of them explicitly say anything about the time of the fulfillment of the events they predict being at any time later than the apostles’ own lifetimes.

On the other hand, there are very many scriptures that speak directly of the kingdom as being present and in the possession of the believers in the first century (e.g. Matt.5:3, 10; 12:28; 13:24, 31, 33; 16:28; 18:4; 22:2/ Mark 1:15/ Luke 16:16; 17:20-21/ John 18:36-37/ Acts2:30-36; 13:32-34; 17:7/ Rom.14:17/ Col.1:13/ Heb.12:28).

For an example of straining out a hermeneutical gnat and swallowing a doctrinal camel, Gregg declares of Revelation 20 that “the passage says ‘a thousand years.’ It does not say, ‘a literal thousand years.’” The passage also says “the Devil” (v. 2) and not “a literal Devil,” but does this give us warrant for denying a literal Devil. It also speaks of “nations” (v. 3), martyrs (v. 4), “heaven” (v. 1), and even “Jesus” (v. 4). But surely all these are literal.

No doubt most of the examples given above are cases of literal use. However, the same passage has many non-literal images—e.g. a “dragon,” a “chain,” a “key,” “Gog and Magog,” etc. And if we wish to take into consideration the total context of the Book of Revelation (something that a good grammatical-historical approach would not neglect), we also have non-literal uses of terms like “Jezebel,” “Lamb,” “Sodom and Egypt,” “beast,” “harlot,” “horns,” etc.

That there are some words used literally and some used symbolically, in Revelation, is admitted by all. However, there is no compelling reason to insist that the “thousand years” is one of the features of the passage that must be understood literally—especially in view of the fact that all the rest of the scriptural passages relevant to the same period here described speak of it lasting “forever” and having “no end” (e.g., 2 Sam.7:13, 16/ Psalm 45:6; 110:4/ Isaiah 9:6-7/ Ezek.37:35/ Dan. 2:44/ Luke 1:32-33). How does this jibe with a literal thousand years?

As for my statement that my esteemed critic finds so absurd, there is a context (as usual), which Dr. Geisler either ignores or wishes to conceal (as usual). My remark was in response to a statement Dr. Geisler made in his earlier criticism of Hank. There he wrote:

“For when the literal method is applied to the unconditional Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, it yields a futurist interpretation of Scripture, which affirms that Christ will not only physically return to earth but He will also establish a literal kingdom (Mt. 19:28), and reign for a literal thousand years (Rev. 20).”

My comment, unvarnished and unabridged, was:

“This is begging the question. The passage says ‘a thousand years.’ It does not say, ‘a literal thousand years.’ The question of whether the thousand years is literal, or whether it is a symbol, is precisely

what is here in dispute.”

Once again, when seen in context, my statement is entirely sound and undeserving of ridicule. Unlike My esteemed critic, I present his entire paragraphs in context, and then affix my comments. His method is to take a single clause from my paragraph, pretend it has no context, and then try to make fun of it rather than interacting with my point. This tactic does not speak well of the honesty of the one who uses it—nor does it give us much occasion for confidence that he has impressive counter-arguments at his command.

Sure, there are figures of speech used in the text like “key” (v. 1), but the literal method of interpretation has always allowed for figures of speech about literal realities (see *ibid.*, chap. 13). It simply insists that the figures of speech and symbols are about literal realities (cf. Rev. 1:20).

Which is exactly what amillennialists say also. For every symbol in scripture we assume there to be a literal truth to which the symbol corresponds. How is this a different approach from that of my esteemed critic?

There is one very great difference, though, between the amillennialists and the dispensationalists. Most amillennialists would feel embarrassed to say, without rational warrant, that one can still be following a literal hermeneutic when saying that the ‘key’ in the passage is symbolic; whereas one departs from the literal hermeneutic when saying that the chain, the pit, the dragon, and the ‘thousand years’ are also symbolic. The line seems to be drawn entirely arbitrarily.

Nineteenth, when confronted with the obviously literal land promises to Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 13-15), Gregg replies, “I don’t find the word ‘literal’ in any of the passages cited.”

My esteemed critic has argued, throughout his response, as if he does not make any distinction between the actual wording of a text, on the one hand, and his interpretation of the text, on the other. Some references to the “land” may be interpreted as literal, and some not as literal, depending on various interpretive factors, on a case-by-case basis. My point was that we are not permitted to insert either words or ideas into the text, which represent only our own controversial opinion of it. Let the text stand, and let us examine it as it is written, and then let us decide what is literal, and what is not.

Yet, he later says these literal promises were literally fulfilled in the days of Joshua—something that could not be true since they are repeated after Joshua’s time (Jer. 11:5; Amos 9:14-15; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 11).

The land promises were indeed literally fulfilled in Joshua’s time. This need not be considered to be controversial, in view of the plain affirmation in Joshua 21:43 and 45. This does not tell us, however, how the poetic passages in the prophets at a later time may have intended them to be understood. This requires exegesis in each case. Once more, the verses cited by Dr. Geisler have no relevance to the question of the mode of fulfillment of the land promises in the New Testament (the two New Testament passages cited make no reference to “land” nor any synonym for it).

As for insisting on the use of the word “literal” to determine whether a passage is literal, I would suggest that he look at the death and resurrection of Jesus passages again. The last time I looked the word “literal” was not in the resurrection accounts. Nor do I find it in Genesis 1-3.

I have answered this nonsense above (he raised these same examples in his fifteenth and sixteenth points). I suppose the repetition of the same invalid points is supposed to make a criticism devoid of validity seem weightier. This tactic does not fool thoughtful readers.

But there again, consistency of hermeneutic is not a primary characteristic of the preterist position.

In Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance," he spoke of "a foolish consistency" that is "the hobgoblin of little minds." If partial preterists do not exhibit a foolish consistency in their hermeneutics, perhaps it is because they have minds, like new wineskins, that have the capacity of expanding.

Further, it is far from "clear" that Heb. 4 or Gal. 4 teaches there is no ethnic fulfillment of the ethnic promises to Israel. On the contrary, it is a denial of both God's unconditional grace and of the historical-grammatical interpretation of numerous passages already mentioned. Just because Abraham has a spiritual seed does not mean there are no promises for his ethnic offspring.

It would be interesting to hear Dr. Geisler's exegesis of Galatians 4:22-31. There, the legitimate heir of the Abrahamic promises is identified with the Church (the children of the free woman). The ethnic Jews of the Old Covenant are said to be "children of the bondwoman." If an unbelieving Jew converts, and embraces Christ, that Jew is now part of the Church, and a child of the free woman. However, those Jews (and Gentiles) who do not embrace Christ, are not in line for any inheritance of the Abrahamic blessings, for "the son of the bondwoman will not be heir with the son of the free woman" (v.30). How would Dr. Geisler exegete this passage?

Twentieth, as to the promise that the land promises to Israel would be "forever"...and all good interpreters know, the meaning of a word is discovered by its context. And the context of Psalm 89:37 declares that the Davidic covenant will be "established forever like the moon." And the last time I looked the moon was still in the sky!

Yes, I saw it too. It's still there. The Davidic covenant is indeed "established forever," and is fulfilled in the current King of David's dynasty, who reigns from a position higher than that from which David ever dreamed of reigning (Matt.28:18). That Jesus' present enthronement is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is affirmed by Peter (Acts 2:29-36) and by Paul (Acts 13:30-33), as well as by all Christians (other than dispensationalists) throughout history. The throne that Jesus sits upon is not the same "literal" chair that David sat upon (that chair was replaced by Solomon with another—1 Kings 10:18), but that is not what it means to occupy the throne of David. One could say that the Queen of England sits on the throne of King George I, and we would only mean that both persons ruled the same country at different times. David reigned over Israel, and the Messiah now reigns, in David's place, over Israel (Matt.2:2; 21:5; 27:11/ John 1:49; 12:13). This is what was the meaning of the promise to David (1 Kings 1:35; 2:4; 8:20).

The dispensationalist strangely departs from literalism when talking about the Messiah's occupancy of the throne of David. This throne, they say, will be established after Jesus returns and will last a thousand years. Yet, the very Psalm that Dr. Geisler quotes (and all other similar promises) say that the tenure of David's son upon his throne will be "forever."

Also, the promise made to David specified that the son of David would occupy the throne after David's death and while he "sleeps with his fathers" (2 Sam.7:12). This is true of the present reign of Christ, for David is presently sleeping with his fathers. However, in the dispensationalists' (theoretical) coming millennium, David will not be sleeping, but will have risen from the dead at the (prior) coming of Christ. Thus Geisler's millennial interpretation departs from the "literal" meaning

of the promise.

2) [Gregg] wrongly assumes God's promises to Abraham and David were conditional, but they clearly were not. Abraham was not even conscious when God made a unilateral unconditional promise to him (in Gen. 15:12), and Psalm 89:31-36 declares that even "if they break my statutes," God promised "Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed will endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me."

See my comments above.

As Paul said of this same God, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

He cannot deny Himself, it is true. But He can certainly deny us, if we deny Him—as is affirmed in the same passage from which Dr. Geisler selectively quotes.

God has not given them back the land yet, but will in the future when the remnant returns to Him (e.g., see Gen. 13:17 and Deut. 30:16-20).

I have not found any passage in scripture that teaches what Dr. Geisler here asserts—least of all the two references he gives. Neither passage makes any reference to a return of a remnant in the last days. The Genesis verse simply promises to give the land to Abraham's seed, which (as we have seen) was fulfilled already. The Deuteronomy passage only says that Israel can dwell in the land if they continue to be faithful. There is no prediction about them being faithful in the last days, or their inhabiting the land. In fact, this very passage, like several others, clearly states that their possession of the land is strictly conditional:

"If your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess." (vv.17-18)

This does not seem like a very good choice of proof texts for a dispensationalist to appeal to.

Twenty-first, to illustrate how wrong the allegorical method can be, Gregg boldly proclaims against the literal historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, calling it "flawed," saying that "the apostles believed that God had fulfilled the promise that David's seed would sit upon a throne when Jesus arose and ascended to the right hand of God." This flatly contradicts a literal interpretation of Scripture...

I couldn't have said it better (well maybe a little better)! The interpretation of the Davidic promises revealed by the apostles did indeed flatly contradict the literal interpretation of scripture. I wonder how many additional examples, like these, my esteemed critic will need to see before he realizes that the dispensationalists' "literal" hermeneutic would be regarded as "flawed" by Christ and the apostles.

First, the Old Testament predictions about a descendant of David were about a Messiah who would sit on a literal throne of David and reign from Jerusalem and have literal descendants (2 Sam. 7; Isa. 11; 24; 32; 55; Psa. 89). Second, Jesus affirmed that he and his disciples would reign on literal thrones when he returned (Mt. 19:28).

I am prepared to be shown all of these “literals” in the texts cited—or in any other texts, for that matter. My translation seems to have omitted all of them.

Third, the last thing Jesus said before he left earth in response to when he would “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6-8) was it was not for them to know when he would do it but that in the interim they should preach the Gospel to all the world. Only two chapters later Peter preached that if Israel would repent God would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 3:19-21).

In Acts 1:6-8, Jesus did not say anything about an “interim.” The disciples still had much to learn about the meaning of the “kingdom” (Rom.14:17) and the meaning of “Israel” (Rom.9:6), so Jesus skirted their question and gave them marching orders. Jesus did not indicate that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel would be postponed, and that the disciples must therefore find something productive to do with themselves in the interim.

In Acts 3, Peter did not mention anything about restoring the kingdom to Israel, in the sense that dispensationalists impose upon those concepts. He said that Jesus would be “sent” to those who would repent, “blotting out” their sins and bringing “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” I imagine that those who repented that day experienced this very thing, just as Peter promised. This passage provides no support for (because it says nothing about) the dispensational viewpoint of a postponed kingdom.

Finally, later the apostle Paul speaks of the literal restoration of ethnic Israel as an event yet to come after the fullness of the Gentiles has come (Rom. 11:24-26).

My esteemed critic may not be aware of any interpretation of these verses other than his own, but he can learn of better ones than his from any good amillennial commentator. However, even allowing that these verses are talking about ethnic Israel (one of the points under dispute), there is nothing here that says a word about restoring the nation nor of any geographical migration. The most that the dispensationalist can milk from Paul’s words in this place would be that “All Israel will be saved.” Being “saved” has nothing to do with geography nor with political nationhood. It has to do with becoming a follower of Christ.

Finally, Gregg offers no arguments against the clear biblical promises that God has made these Abrahamic and Davidic promises with an immutable oath (as Heb. 6:17 and Psa. 89:20-37). These powerful arguments are simply dismissed by Gregg with the curt comment: “Sorry, but the New Testament writers simply disagree with My esteemed critic’s claim that these promises ‘have never been fulfilled.’ See Luke 1:70-75 and 2 Corinthians 1:20.”

Why should I provide arguments against beliefs that I affirm? The Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant were truly sealed with an immutable oath. God showed His integrity by keeping these promises and fulfilling them in Christ. This is taught throughout the New Testament, not only in the two references that I gave as examples.

We have already shown above that this is not the case. And there is nothing in Luke 1 nor 2 Cor. 1 to the contrary. Check them out. The first one is simply a prediction that the Messiah, son of David, would come and fulfill this covenant. It says nothing about whether it was completely fulfilled in Christ’s first coming and present session at the right hand of God.

Luke 1:68-69 says that God “has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets...” Doesn’t sound like future tense. Check it out.

The second text (2 Cor. 1:20) is misapplied for several reasons: 1) That Christ fulfilled salvation promises does not mean he fulfilled the land and throne promises to Israel.

The texts says “all the promises of God...”

Check it out. Are we to interpret literally, or not?

2) Even some reformed theologians (like Poythress and Hoekema) admit that there is still to come a literal fulfillment of these promises made to Israel.

These guys again? Why should I care about the opinions of reformed theologians any more than I care about those of dispensational theologians—or of preterist theologians, for that matter? Let’s talk about scripture.

3) Historical-grammatical interpretation of Old Testament land and throne promises cannot be allegorized away by amills and preterist misapplication of New Testament texts. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, this kind of twisted interpretation of Old Testament text is not exegesis but eisegesis.

Is there an argument of some kind hidden in this paragraph? I see bold assertions. I see nothing resembling support for those assertions.

Indeed, it is a retroactive eisegesis that reads back into the Old Testament texts a meaning that was never there either in the expressed intention of the author or as understood by the people to whom he wrote (see *ibid.*, chap. 13).

Even the prophets did not understand the meaning of their own predictions (1 Peter 1:10-12). Why should we think that their hearers were more enlightened than they? Why should our understanding, which has the advantage of the explanations given by the inspired apostles, be restricted to the low level of those whom Jesus describes as “blind guides”?

In brief, Gregg’s attempt to rescue the partial preterist position he shares with Hank Hanegraaff is a failure. It rests upon a methodologically unorthodox way of interpreting Scripture.

Only if “orthodox” means “dispensational.” By this definition, all Christians prior to 1830 followed “unorthodox” methodologies.

If this same method were used on the Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Christ, the preterist would also be theologically unorthodox. Thus, while partial preterism itself is not heretical, its hermeneutic is unorthodox, and if applied consistently, would lead to heresy, as indeed it does in full preterism.

The methods of the partial preterists are no more “unorthodox” than are those of the dispensationalists. The methods of both involve a mixture of literal and non-literal interpretation (as has all sound biblical exegesis throughout all time). The main difference is that partial preterists tend to take at face value the non-symbolic portions of scripture (e.g., time references in Revelation and Matthew 24), and then interpret the symbolic portions according to genre. By contrast, dispensationalists take the symbolic portions literally, and then do not take literal statements (like time references, found in the non-apocalyptic introduction and epilogue) at face value.

Conclusion:

I have not made it my mission to “defend” partial preterism, amillennialism, or any other “ism.” I have nothing to gain by defending them, since I have no stake in them (unlike my esteemed critic, who is employed by a dispensational institution, and thus has a palpable stake in defending dispensationalism). Those who are familiar with my teaching and writing (Dr. Geisler, forgivably, must not be) know that I have no theological ax to grind. I am a theologically-disinterested Bible teacher merely. As such, I have studied the Bible with an open mind for about forty years, and have been willing to make adjustments, when called for, in my theology. It was this open-mindedness that allowed me to see past the rhetoric and shallow arguments of the dispensationalism that I once taught, and to move in a direction that allows me to take all scripture in its proper context without suppressing any information. It is a delight to serve God without the straight-jacket of inflexible, man-made restrictions imposed upon my thinking. I truly desire that this freedom may come to be known by all of my dispensational brethren.