

## **Evidence Against Both Preterism and Idealism**

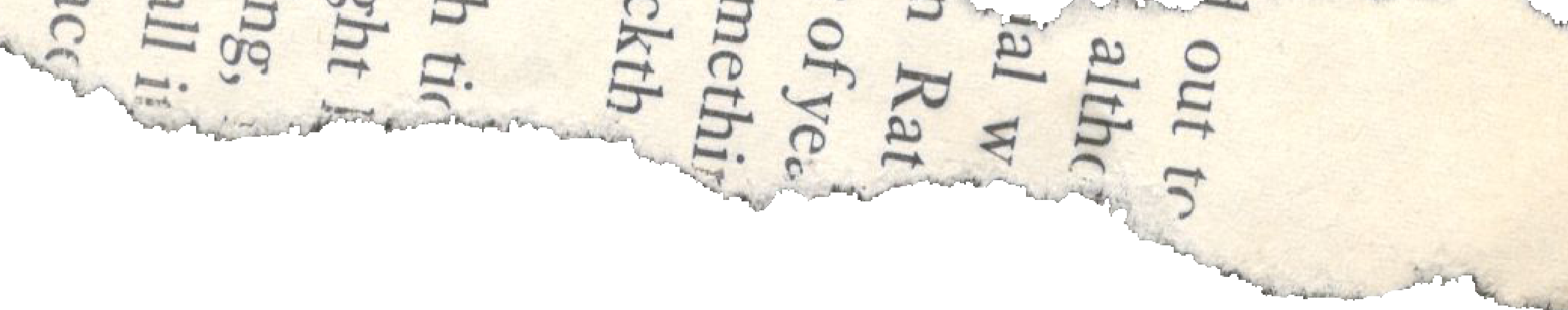
*In the seventies and eighties premillennialism was at its heyday and predictions were at a premium. It is safe to say that some overzealous believers went overboard on their prognostications. The classic example of this hyper millennialism is Edgar Whisenant's 88 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Be In 1988. Whisenant predicted the rapture would happen between September 11-13 in 1988. Four and a half million copies were sold. On a personal note, my brother began attending church after reading this booklet, but then stopped on September 14th, never to return. Due to the mistakes made in predictions, there was a backlash that resulted in many crossing over to either the preterist or idealist camps concerning the best way to interpret the book of Revelation and Matthew 24.*

*It must be stated that no group interprets Revelation completely literally. Premillennialists seek to be as literal as possible, while recognizing the genre of apocalyptic calls for some leeway due to its generous use of metaphor. While the beast coming out of the sea with seven heads and ten horns recorded in Revelation 13 should be understood as representing something else, the general course of events seems to be referring to the end of time. Everything after chapter four in Revelation refers to the last seven years of this age, culminating in the return of Jesus who reigns for a thousand years as King, according to premillennialism. Preterism became fashionable because it maintained some resemblance of literal interpretation, but it rejected the idea of prediction of the end of time. It states that Revelation as well as Matthew 24 refer to the end of the age of Judaism. In AD 70 the Romans destroyed the temple, slaughtered the Jews and ransacked Jerusalem, fulfilling all the predictions made in Revelation and Matthew 24, including the abomination of desolation and the return of Jesus, though coming spiritually in judgment of Israel. Idealism also became popular, because it answered the problems of false predictions by those who believed they were living in the end of time, which seems to have been true throughout the ages, and it maintained Revelation was written to all Christians throughout the ages and therefore still helpful today, though not predicting the soon demise of the world. Idealism states that Revelation should not be interpreted literally, because it describes the times of Christianity throughout time; these kind of things like persecution, suffering, etc. are to take place throughout history, and Revelation gives us help to live through such tough times.*

*I understand the popularity of preterism and especially idealism, but I believe the evidence reveals that both of these schemes are false narratives. Premillennialism gives the best way to interpret Revelation, though we need to be more responsible concerning the prediction of exact dates for the second coming or rapture. Below I will describe three basic reasons why the views of both preterism and idealism should be abandoned.*

### **Jewish Apocalyptic Writings**

*The first argument against both preterism and idealism concerns the genre of apocalyptic writings. When seeking to interpret the Bible, our first order of business is to discover what the original author intended to say to the original audience, keeping in mind that God is the ultimate author. John wrote Revelation in the common apocalyptic genre of his day. According to Leon Morris and other experts in apocalyptic literature, the common characteristics of*



apocalyptic genre are: 1) metaphor rich, 2) presented in dreams and visions, 3) impending sense of doom, 4) violent end of history, and 5) optimism for the believer.[1] Concerning the fourth point he elaborates:

Apocalyptic in general makes considerable use of dualism. The thought is taken very seriously that 'the Most High has made not one world but two' (2 Esdras 7:50). Thus the present suffering is contrasted with the future salvation. Evil and good are constantly set over against one another, as are evil spirits and good spirits. The imagery of light and darkness is employed, black is set over against white. God is seen as in opposition to Satan, God's people as opposed to the heathen. This age is contrasted with the age to come, this world with the kingdom of God. R.H. Fuller sees in this latter point the characteristic of this type of literature: '...unlike prophecy, apocalyptic portrays that culmination not in this-worldly terms, but in a new heaven and a new earth. It envisages two ages, this age and the age to come. It is this transcendental element which marks the salient difference between prophecy and apocalyptic.'[2]

We have approximately 200 examples of apocalyptic literature dating from BC 200 to AD 100, all from Jewish and Christian writers and all including the above characteristics. The Fourth Book of Ezra is a case in point. Chapter six describes the signs of the end of the age in similar terms as Matthew 24 and Revelation. It begins with the question, "What will be the dividing of the times? Or when will be the end of the first age and the beginning of the age that follows?"[3] After including several signs including "when the humiliation of Zion is complete," it states:

It shall be that whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you shall be the men who were taken up, who from their birth have not tasted death; and the heart of the earth's inhabitants shall be changed and converted to a different spirit. For evil shall be blotted out, and deceit shall be quenched; faithfulness shall flourish, and corruption shall be overcome, and the truth, which has been so long without fruit, shall be revealed.[4]

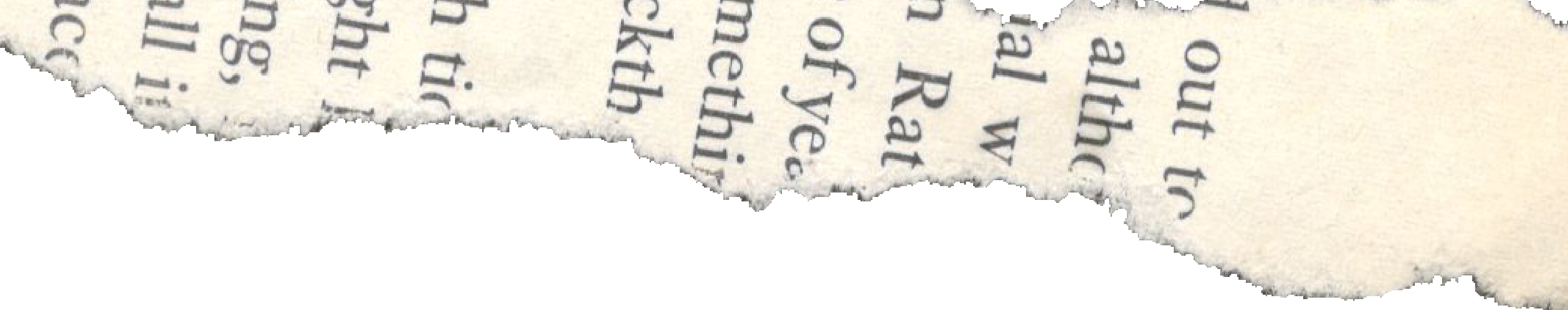
Interestingly, in the seventh chapter Ezra allows for a four hundred year interim where Messiah reigns, similar to the thousand-year reign of Revelation. John would have been familiar with 4th Ezra as well as a number of other apocalyptic writings including 1st Enoch. To suggest, as preterism suggests, that Revelation and Matthew 24 were written concerning the age of Judaism being over, not the end of the world, is to misunderstand the genre. The original author would not have used the belief of the times with a completely different understanding without notifying clearly of his intent to change the genre's normal character. Revelation also

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[1] Some would add pseudonymity, but a case can be made that both Daniel and Revelation did not use pseudonyms.

[2] Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 49; See Brian Daly, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 8-9.

[3] James Charlesworth, editor, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 1:534.

[4] *Ibid.*, 1:535.



has letter and prophecy genres included, but to say that it is the only apocalyptic literature that is not speaking of a violent end of history is special pleading. When Revelation is read without preconceived views, it is clear that it is referring to the end of history, which is exactly what you would expect from the genre. The only class of preterism that would fit the apocalyptic genre is the liberal view that states Revelation intended to speak of the end but got it wrong. Conservative Christians do not have this option and do not need to take it anyway, as we will see. Idealism is also found wanting when the apocalyptic genre is properly understood. Revelation, just like the other apocalyptic writings, primarily refers to the very end of time, not basic life for the Christian at all times. Revelation can certainly be used in all eras of the church, because of its principles and the ultimate promise that we win in the end, but its main intent of revealing how this age will end and the next begin when Messiah returns is lost in the Idealist perspective. From a biblical theology viewpoint, Revelation concludes what Genesis began concerning God's overarching plan for humans.

### **The Natural Interpretation of Revelation Alongside Matthew 24**

Revelation 1:19 seems to give a general outline for the book. It states, "Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this." Chapter one, which is a vision of Jesus that is brought up throughout the rest of the book, fits "what you have seen." Chapter 2-3 consists of seven letters to seven local churches at the time of John, which fits "what is." "What will take place after this" refers to the rest of the book since *μετὰ ταῦτα* (after this) is used at the beginning and end of 4:1, "After this I looked and there in heaven was an open door. The first voice that I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'" Some have suggested that "come up here" refers to the rapture, but that is highly speculative. But using "after this" so prominently seems to be indicating that chapter four on refers to the end of time, or at the very least after the "what is" stage of the local churches in Asia minor.

Revelation is not strictly chronological. Peter Williamson describes the structure of Revelation well:

Probably the most important point to note about Revelation's structure is that its plot does not advance chronologically. Although the visions unfold one after another in an orderly manner, the story advances by a spiral rather than a straight path, like a road that circles its way up a mountain, offering diverse vistas of the terrain below. Sometimes multiple visions depict a single event. For example, the relationship between the series of seven seals, trumpets, and bowls is not strictly sequential, since the sixth item in each series seems to position the reader at the same moment just short of the end of human history, while the seventh seems to signal the end. Moreover, the forward movement of the visions is disrupted by flashbacks, such as those that recall the birth and exaltation of the Messiah (5:5, 9; 12:5) and by atemporal visions of heavenly worship in which God's victory is celebrated as already achieved (7:9-17; 11:15-18; 15:2-4; 19:5-8). Despite these nonchronological elements, the narrative of Revelation does progress from the prophet's first vision of the risen Christ (chaps 1-3), to a vision of the heavenly throne room (chaps. 4-5), through increasingly severe chastisements of the

world and trials for the Church during her time of testimony (chaps. 6-20), to the return of Christ (chap. 19) and the full arrival of God's kingdom in the final two chapters.[1]

Though not exactly chronological, Revelation does progress to the end, just like all other apocalyptic writings. At the sixth seal the enemies of God are crying to the rocks to hide them, mirroring Isaiah 2:10-22, which Isaiah 2:2 says takes place "in the last days." Revelation 1:6b concludes, "...because the great day of their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?" At the seventh trumpet in 11:15b it describes the end: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." Verse 17 describes God as "the Almighty, who is and who was." Notice "And is to come" from 1:4 is missing, because He has arrived. The sixth bowl ends with the battle of Armageddon (see also 9:13-19 and 19:19-21) and with the seventh bowl it is announced, "It is done!" Each series of seals, trumpets and bowls concludes with "There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. And a severe earthquake occurred like no other since people have been on the earth, so great was the quake" (Rev 16:18; also 11:19 and 8:5; compare with Zechariah 14).

Once the final bowls of God's wrath are poured out on humans and the battle of Armageddon begins, Jesus comes back in chapter 19 defeating the enemy of God's people. Chapter 19 seems to describe the second coming of Christ. He only comes twice (Heb 9:28). The Greek word for coming is *parousia*; this word is very important theologically and is used in Matthew 24, 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 1:7, which is quoting Daniel 7:13. Matthew 24:26-31 describes the coming of the Son of Man in such a way that was very public, where all the peoples of the earth will see him. It will not be secret; it will be like lightning from the east to the west is visible to all, accompanied by cosmic signs in the sun, moon and stars. "All these things" of verse 34 must include the coming of the Lord described in 30-31, which rules out any partial preterist view. Matthew 24:30-31 describes the same event as 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58; 2 Thess 2:1-12 and Rev 1:7; 19:11-21. After reviewing all of these passages, any suggestion that they refer to different events is special pleading; they are obviously speaking of the same event, which takes place at the end of time. Matthew 24:3 reveals that the chapter is speaking about "the sign of your coming and of the end of the age." Though some preterists say this refers to the end of the Jewish age, it is clearly speaking of the end of the present age for all of us, culminating in Jesus' second coming. He is using the two-age scheme in the same fashion as all the other apocalyptic writings. Verse six ends with "but the end is still to come" indicating that false Messiahs and wars will come, but the end will not come yet. Verse 14 says the gospel will be preached "in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." 1 Thessalonians 4:15 says the coming of the Lord will bring the rapture where believers who are still alive "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air," to be with the Lord forever, according to the end of the passage. 1 Thessalonians 4 can only be referring to the very end of time, but it is also clearly referring to the same event as Matthew 24 (with angels, trumpets, Jesus coming in the clouds and the gathering of the elect). 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 says this event will take place at the last trumpet where we receive new bodies; how many trumpets come after the last trumpet? Revelation 1:7, which refers ultimately to Revelation 19 also must be seen as the second

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[1] Peter Williamson, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 25.

coming of the Lord at the end of time, where He comes in the cloud, every eye sees Him, seven trumpets are blown, and after the last one He comes and wipes out the evil armies, casting the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire.

The *parousia* is used as a technical term of eschatology when referring to the coming of the Lord, which presents serious problems for the pretribulation rapture view (Mt 24:29 declares the second coming takes place after the great tribulation), but it also casts severe doubts on preterism. Hebrews 9:28 says Jesus will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. Titus 2:13 says our blessed hope is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says we are to be comforted with the promise of the Lord's coming (15), along with our meeting Him in the air (17). Paul then immediately exhorts believers to be ready and alert for the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1-11). In the context, Paul is referring to the coming of the Lord with the day of the Lord. Though in the Old Testament the day of the Lord can refer to any judgment from God, it became an eschatological term for the end of the age. Matthew 24 answers the question concerning the sign of His coming and the end of the age. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 refers to the coming of our Lord and our being gathered to Him (1). It states that the man of lawlessness will be destroyed "at the appearance of his coming" (8) (Nero killed himself in AD 68; he was not destroyed in AD 70 by the supposed coming of the Lord in judgment). Revelation 19 describes the coming of the Lord to defeat the beast. The coming of the Lord is an eschatological technical phrase referring to the second coming of Christ. The second coming is not a third or fourth coming; it is the second coming. Matthew 24 mentions the coming of the Lord several times, associating it with the end of the age (3), with great fanfare (27), after the tribulation where every eye will see Him (29-30), accompanied by angels, loud trumpets and the gathering of the elect (31), with the warning that we need to be ready (36-44). Matthew 24 is immediately followed by a parable in chapter 25 explaining the delay of the second coming, calling us to be ready at all times. Chapter 25 concludes with judgment "when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him." Pretribulation rapture proponents say Matthew 24 refers to a secret coming, not the second coming. Preterists say it refers to a separate coming in between the first and second coming. Post-tribulation rapture advocates say all the passages above refer to the same event - the second coming of Christ, the day of the Lord, where we are raptured to meet Him in the air (the elect being gathered to Him), the battle of Armageddon takes place and the man of lawlessness (beast, antichrist) and false prophet are destroyed by being cast into the lake of fire.

Amillennialists suggest that Revelation 20 goes back to the beginning of the church, but the indicators suggest differently. Satan is bound after the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. He is bound "so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed." This binding must be after chapter 13, because in 13:7 it describes the beast having authority over the nations. In 12:9 it states that Satan is "the one who deceives the whole world." The description of the binding suggests a complete binding; it says the angel who bound Satan had a great chain, bound Satan, threw him into the abyss, closed it and sealed it to keep him from deceiving the nations. Chapter 20 goes on to describe Satan being released from the prison for a short time to deceive the nations, then he is "thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are." Notice he is thrown into hell after the beast and false prophet. The whole passage seamlessly describes Jesus

coming back and throwing the beast and false prophet into hell, having Satan bound for a thousand years, then released and finally to be thrown into hell with the beast and false prophet. The Great White Throne judgment takes place and the new creation takes place, all after the thousand-year reign of Christ.

Preterists are forced to explain away so many obvious indicators that Revelation is referring to the end of time after chapter four, that it seems incredible. Unless there is good reason to interpret the general flow of Revelation differently than what seems to be the natural way of reading it, we should embrace the idea that it predominantly is referring to the end of time, probably the last seven years of this age. But this is also true for the idealists. Why should we think Revelation is atemporal, simply describing how difficult it will be for Christians in this age? I suggest that idealism is a reaction to the overly dogmatic predictions of the pretribulation rapture view, rather than a careful exegesis of Revelation.

But what about the indicators that it would take place in the life of John?[1] Revelation begins with “what must soon take place” in 1:1 and “the time is near” in 1:3, and it ends with 22:6 “the things that must soon take place,” 22:7 “Look, I am coming soon,” 22:10 “because the time is near,” 22:12 “Look, I am coming soon,” and 22:20 “Yes, I am coming soon.” In all the references for coming soon, the Greek word is *taku*, which is most often translated quickly. Revelation 2:16 translates the same word as “quickly.” The idea of the time being near is similar to Acts 2:17 which refers to the last days beginning at the day of Pentecost and 1 John 2:18 saying “this is the last hour.” God’s timing is not like ours. We are living in the last days, and we have been since the birth of the church. When Jesus does come, it will be quickly, so we better be prepared ahead of time. Nothing in these statements demands a first century fulfillment of all of Matthew 24 and Revelation, which both seem to be referring to the end of time concluding with the second coming. In light of the bulk of the evidence it seems wise to adopt the natural interpretation of both Revelation and Matthew 24 that sees them describing the very end of time and the second coming of Christ.

One last evidence for preterism should be discussed. In *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* Kenneth Gentry Jr. describes Revelation as referring to the time of Nero.[2] It should be acknowledged that some of the details of Revelation can be associated with events at that time. The Hebrew letters for Caesar Nero add up to 666.[3] How are we to understand this? Allow me to quote Williamson again:

Just as biblical typology shaped John’s prophetic message, it also provides a key to interpreting Revelation throughout the history of the Church. When individuals, governments, and cultures behave like the enemies of God’s people depicted in Revelation, readers can recognize the resemblances and respond accordingly. For example, Nero, perhaps Domitian, Hitler, and Stalin - and the empires presided over by each - behaved like the beast and are rightly recognized as its agents. Revelation links

[1] Mt 24:34 says “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” “All these things” rules out partial preterism. Either Jesus was wrong, he meant race in referring to generation (the Jewish race), or all of the events beginning with the birth pains would be seen by one generation. In light of the evidence above, the last option seems to be the best.

[2] C. Marvin Pate, general editor, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 37-92.

[3] *Ibid.*, 68.

the idolatrous materialistic culture of the Roman Empire with Babylon. For those with eyes to see, the consumerist, sexually immoral, and murderous (if we consider abortion and euthanasia) secular culture of the twenty-first century bears many of the same traits. In every age Christians must discern the manifestations of these evil powers by their fruits and respond appropriately. This does not mean that the adversaries depicted in Rev 13-20 can be reduced to types that share common attributes and arise from time to time in history. Rather, despite its figurative language and elusive symbolism, Revelation seems to say some specific things about the end of history that do not fit the fall of Rome or any empire since.[1]

After Nero died there was a cult-like belief in Nero redivivus,[2] that Nero would rise from the dead. Revelation 17:9-11 describes seven kings. It says “Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain for only a little while. The beast that was and is not, is itself an eighth king, but it belongs to the seven and is going to destruction.” This is probably not referring to reincarnation, but it is describing the beast as a revived Nero. Most scholars believe the emperor at the time of Revelation’s writing was Domitian (81-96), not Nero. Domitian is the one who now is at the time of John’s writing. Nero was the fifth emperor (Julius was not an emperor) and thus had already fallen. Nero was a type of antichrist, not the final antichrist. Similarly, Daniel describes a little horn rising up and causing “the abomination that causes desolation.” It seems at first to be referring to Antiochus IV of the third empire described in chapter 2, 8 and 11. But in chapter 7 the little horn is from the fourth empire, Rome, which seems to be described in chapter 2 as being revived partially at the end of time, only to be wiped out by the coming of Messiah. James Hamilton Jr. makes a strong case for the little horn of the third kingdom to be a type of the little horn of the fourth kingdom; Antiochus IV is a type of the antichrist.[3] Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation to be future to His first coming (Mt 24:15), even though it originally seemed to refer to the event of Antiochus IV sacrificing a pig to Zeus in the Jewish temple in 168 BC. Jesus recognized the use of typology and spoke of the ultimate abomination caused by the antichrist. What does all of this have to do with Revelation? Daniel, Matthew 24 and Revelation seem to be describing the same events that ultimately take place at the end of time, but with types or precursors beforehand, antichrists before the Antichrist. 1 John 2:18 states, “Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour.” Notice John believed in a literal antichrist to come in the end with antichrist precursors as types.

When Revelation and Matthew 24 are seen in their overall context, and the supposed arguments for preterism and idealism are answered, it seems wise to embrace what I am calling the natural interpretation of Revelation and Matthew 24. We want to be sure that we don’t overreact to the pretribulation rapture perspective, adopting something that doesn’t fit the

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[1] Peter Williamson, *Revelation*, 32.

[2] *Ascension of Isaiah* 4.2; *Oracle of Sibylline* viii, 68-72.

[3] James Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 85-104.

natural reading of Revelation and Matthew 24. Next we will see what the early church fathers believed and where preterism and idealism may have come from.

### **Early Church Fathers**

One final evidence against both preterism and idealism is found in the writings of the early church fathers. In the first three centuries of the church, those who chose to write on the subject embraced what we now call historical premillennialism. No one advocated amillennialism, preterism or idealism. In the early fourth century, after persecution of the church was stopped under Constantine, Eusebius rejected the book of Revelation and millennialism, the belief of those he called chiliasts. Revelation paints a dim view of Rome, so it makes sense since Eusebius was a big fan of the emperor of Rome, that he would have an adverse view concerning the eschatology of Revelation. In the latter part of the fourth century Tyconius and Augustine created the idea of amillennialism, which became the dominant eschatology for a millennium, but had no early church father's as advocates. The first to hold a view close to preterism was the Jesuit Luis De Alcazar (1554-1613), who wrote a commentary on Revelation combatting the Protestant accusation of the Pope as antichrist. If Preterism was the correct understanding of Revelation and Matthew 24, we should have first and second century Christians advocating this view, yet we have none. Idealism is a modern perspective with no clear advocates before modern times. Are we to believe that the church got it wrong for 2000 years until some brilliant scholars came along? This is what some have called chronological snobbery. I like to say that if it is new, it is probably not true.

Let's look at the evidence for premillennialism in the first three centuries. Papias (AD 60-130), a disciple of John who wrote Revelation,[1] was the earliest writer on the subject. He wrote a five-volume work entitled *An Exposition of the Discourses of the Lord*, unfortunately of which all we have are a few fragments. Eusebius records that Papias is the first to teach a literal millennialism. The *Didache* dating at the end of the first century included a mini-apocalypse the writer describes as the last days and includes the arrival of the antichrist, a falling away of the saints and a post-tribulation rapture.[2] The *Shepherd of Hermas*, written late first century to early second century, tells of the great tribulation to come and also describes what we are calling types beforehand. It states, "Go, therefore, and declare to the Lord's elect his mighty works, and tell them that this beast is a foreshadowing of the great tribulation that is coming." [3] Note that the author does not think the tribulation has already taken place, which preterism demands and does hold that there is an end time tribulation to come. He agrees in substance with what I call the natural interpretation of Revelation and/or Matthew 24.

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), Irenaeus (AD 130-202), Tertullian (AD 160-240), Hippolytus (d. AD 235), Commodianus (AD 240), and Lactantius (AD 260-330) all wrote extensively on eschatology. None of them held to preterism or idealism and all embraced a form of

[1] It is admitted that most historical-critical scholars reject Johannine authorship of Revelation, but a strong case can be made for the Apostle John as author; see Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2-6.

[2] Michael Holmes, editor, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 369; *Didache* 16:3-8.

[3] *Ibid.*, 499; *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 23:5.



premillennialism. Justin Martyr believed the following concerning the end times and the book of Revelation:

1. He believed the Jews would be saved in the end, quoting Zech 12:10 (ANF 1:210).[1]
2. He believed the temple would be rebuilt, though he admitted that many Christians thought otherwise (ANF 1:239).
3. He believed that at the return of Christ Christians will experience the resurrection of the dead, a thousand-year reign will take place in Jerusalem and the temple will be adorned and enlarged to the Ezekiel capacity (ANF 1:239).
4. He believed that the Apostle John wrote Revelation and predicted a 1000-year millennium that would end with the judgment day and eternal state (ANF 1:240).
5. He believed that the “man of apostasy” would bring tribulation on Christians, but the persecution would bring revival and then the 2nd coming will arrive. Notice he didn’t believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, but he did believe in a premillennial view of Revelation and Matthew 24.

### **Here is what Irenaeus believed:**

1. He believed in a literal antichrist at the end of time who would set up his throne in the rebuilt temple of the Jews (ANF 1:553), using Revelation, Daniel and 2 Thessalonians 2 to support his beliefs. Listen to his words:

*But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that ‘many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham Isaac, and Jacob.’[2]*

2. He believed Daniel predicted the end, and he took the numbers literally (1:554).
3. He believed Revelation was still future and predicted the cataclysmic end (1:554).
4. He believed that the gathering of Christians in what some call the rapture quoting Lk 17:34 takes place at the end, not before the tribulation (1:556; see also Tertullian ANF 3:455, 563, 343 for similar beliefs).
5. He believed the antichrist will impose a mark 666, based on 6000 years of the world, a thousand years for each day of creation (1:557; see also Hippolytus d.235 who wrote a commentary on Daniel and a treatise entitled “On Christ and Antichrist” ANF 5:179).
6. He believed in a great tribulation to come at the end: “For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption” (1:558).

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[1] All references to ANF refer to Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

[2] Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 1:560.

7. He believed the antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan, which is why it is not mentioned in Revelation, and he will come pretending to vindicate the oppressed (1:559).
8. He believed John wrote Revelation during Domitian's reign (1:560).
9. He believed in a millennial reign to come that should not be taken allegorically (1:565-567; see also Tertullian 3:342; Commodianus in AD 240 ANF 4:212; Lactantius AD 260-330 ANF 7:254-255).
10. He believed that the land was a part of the promise: It was never given to Abraham, so it will be given during the millennium to the people of God (1:561). Robert Daly explains his thought:

*For Irenaeus, the earthly millennium is a transitional stage to a more comprehensive and mysterious salvation, allowing the righteous to "become accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father" (AH 5.35.1). But because the flesh, created by God, is made for life, and because the Word took our flesh on himself to save it, the salvation of the flesh must be taken with utter seriousness, and the vision of the latter chapters of the book of Revelation not diluted by typological interpretation.[1]*

*Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Commodianus and Lactantius all wanted to preserve the natural way of interpreting Revelation as future, because they believed too much spiritualizing or allegorizing took away from the Biblical belief that the physical universe was not bad, but rather it was God's design as the incarnation proved.*

### **Conclusion**

*From a historical perspective, the early church fathers of the first, second and third centuries that wrote on the subject of eschatology in Revelation and Matthew 24 were in agreement that it was predominately future to them and should be taken in what I am calling a natural interpretation. It is hard to believe that the disciples of John all unanimously completely misunderstood John. It is hard to believe that no one in the first century, or for that matter the first fifteen centuries, interpreted Revelation or Matthew 24 in a preterist or idealist fashion. The hermeneutic wasn't changed until Rome became friends with the church, making it awkward to have a book that condemns Rome in the last days; this appears to be why Eusebius rejected Revelation as canonical. The hermeneutic was changed again during the Reformation by the Roman Catholic writer Luis De Alcazar to combat the reformers' accusation of the pope being the antichrist. The hermeneutic was changed again in the late twentieth century as a reaction to the failed predictions of over-zealous pre-tribulation rapture enthusiasts. In light of the unanimous agreement of all apocalyptic literature written in the second temple Judaism period, the uniform understanding of the early church fathers and the natural way of reading both Revelation and Matthew 24, it seems we would need much more evidence than what the preterists and idealists have given in order to convince us against a premillennial perspective.*

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[1] Robert Daly, editor, *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 117.