

Is Preterism Taboo?

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I REMEMBER YEARS AGO playing a game called *Taboo* with friends. Players would pair off and one of the pair would draw a card from the stack. At the top of the card is a word that the player must try to get their partner to guess within one minute. On the card, below the target word, is a list of words that cannot be used in the process. Because of the time limit, the ensuing dialog can become quite chaotic, creating hilarious clues and prompts as well as guesses. Typically, members of other pairs will watch the timer and the forbidden words list to ensure the rules aren't violated. One example which, for reasons I don't know, I can still recall is the word "parasol." I had to try to get my partner to say "parasol," but two of the words I wasn't allowed to use were "umbrella" (which was my first thought) and "shade." You can see how the list of forbidden words makes the task more challenging.

The thought occurred to me, what if God had to abide by a loose version of these rules when He inspired the New Testament authors to write about the timing of Christ's return? Regardless of your eschatology, let's pretend for the moment that God the Father intended for Christ to return in the first century, yet, for various reasons (perhaps the human nature to procrastinate), He didn't want to specify the exact day or hour. He only wanted to convey that Christ would return before all who had witnessed His earthly ministry died. Recall that even the Son and the angels did not know the exact time (Matt 24:36).

So here is how *Taboo* with a twist would work: God draws a card that states, "Communicate to the first-century generation that Christ will return in their lifetime, but don't give a specific day or hour." That's the task; the list of forbidden words and phrases is supplied by futurists. How would this play out? God inspires His Son, the apostles, and New Testament authors to provide the clues, while the futurists keep watch to ensure that no forbidden words or phrases are used.

Jesus: "This generation shall not pass—"

Futurism: Forbidden word! The term "this generation" can mean "this race" or "that generation."

Jesus: "Some of you standing here—"

Futurism: Forbidden word! This could apply to the transfiguration, or the Day of Pentecost. It doesn't mean that some standing there would see Christ return.

Some 20-30 years later the New Testament authors started giving clues:

Author of Hebrews: “. . . *in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son—*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! The “last days” didn’t end in AD 70—we are still living in the last days.

Luke: “. . . *he is about to judge the world—*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! The Greek word *mello* doesn’t necessarily mean *about to*; it can mean *certainly*.

Paul: “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! The use of the plural “we” does not necessarily imply that Paul expected he and his audience would experience the return of Christ. Paul is employing what is referred to as the editorial, royal, or collective “we.”

James: “*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.*” (Implying Christ would return within their lifetime)

Futurism: Forbidden word! This does not mean that the Lord would return within their lifetime, but that God wants His people to always live in faith and expectancy.

Peter: “*He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last time.*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! “Last time” is the same as “the last days”—we are still in them.

Peter: “*The end of all things is at hand.*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! “At hand” doesn’t mean that Christ’s return was imminent in the first century, but that it was now at hand because the last days had begun. Before the last days began with Christ’s earthly ministry the end couldn’t have been “at hand.”

John: “*Children, it is the last hour—*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! “Last hour” is just like “last time” and “last days.”

Finally, in the book of Revelation we read:

John: “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! The word “soon” in the Greek can also mean “quickly.” Thus, the events of Revelation weren’t to take place soon with respect to the first-century generation, but once the events begin to unfold, they will all transpire quickly.

Jesus: “*Behold, I am coming soon.*”

Futurism: Forbidden word! This term may refer to the certainty of the events in question rather than the nearness in time.

Time's up! Rather than sixty seconds, God had forty years to give every clue imaginable to communicate the return of Christ at some time during the lifetime of the early disciples. However, futurism has disallowed every term! This makes me wonder, if God *had* truly ordained for Christ to return during the lifetime of His disciples, and God wanted to communicate that to the first-century saints, how else could He have done so? Every attempt (and I've cited only a handful for illustration) is refuted by futurism. And these are not armchair theologians, these are biblical scholars! Just as it is impossible for God to lie, would it also be impossible, in light of futurist theology, for God to communicate a first-century return of Christ had He wanted to? It is not my intent to disparage futurist theologians—I continue to benefit immensely from their works. But if our theology makes it impossible for God to communicate something, perhaps we need to revisit our theology. †