

Did The Jews Care About Time?

Written by [Don Preston](#)

In his book reviewing Realized Eschatology, brother Paul Dubois makes an attempt to discount the Biblical time statements about the coming of the Lord. Dubois readily admits the language seems temporally significant yet insists God "is not controlled by time; rather He controls time, although He is not interested in 'calendar time,' as western man is. Time, as indicated in OT history, centers more on the quality of events than on chronology, or the imminence of the happenings. For Israel, often in distressing circumstances, the certainty that the God of all history was in control of events was more important than understanding the time of coming fulfillment."¹ (footnote) He continues an attempt to discredit any temporal significance in time words by claiming the prophets "didn't seem to be preoccupied with the proximate time of the prophesied matters, they certainly wanted to know the circumstances of their coming Messiah."

To brother Dubois time words did not signify time; they signified certainty. Time words were not overly important to the Jews, they just wanted to know what was to happen and the fact it would positively happen, not WHEN.

Interestingly, chapter 2 of our brother's book is about interpretive methodology. He has a very important statement found on page 21: "God employed the language of humanity to communicate His message in the Bible to humanity in humanity's own circumstances and social environment." He cites with approval Alexander Campbell, "The fact God has clothed His communication in human language, and that He has spoken by men, to men, is prima facie evidence that He is to be understood as in conversing with another" (emphasis in Dubois) 2 (footnote)

This article will examine two main points raised by brother Dubois: 1. That the Jews were not concerned with time; 2. That statements of imminence simply expressed certainty not time. We will do this by examining God's method of communication.

Not When, Just What?

The contention that the Jews were not concerned about time, only certainty, is negated by a simple walk through the concordance. We shall examine this subject by posing questions about certain situations found in scriptures.

1. When Israel was suffering in bondage were they concerned about the simple certainty of relief or when relief would come? See Deut.26:6-8. Remember the time promise relative to the release, Genesis 15. Were they not concerned with WHEN?

2. When Israel sinned, God repeatedly asked, "How long will you provoke me?" See Exodus 16:28; Numbers 14:11,27; I Kings 18:21. Now was God, Who is above time, not concerned about WHEN his people were going to repent? Or was He just concerned about certainty? If God was concerned with WHEN His people would turn from sin the contention that God is not concerned with time is irrelevant!

3. When God's people were oppressed they continually cried out, "How long O Lord?" This is a very significant question in scripture, asked for the last time in Revelation 6:9ff. The question of "when" was given a positive time response vs.11. See Psalms 13; 35; 74, etc. Can we believe those in suffering did not care about when they were vindicated? See Psalms 80:4; Habakkuk 1:2; Zechariah 1:2 also.

4. When Balaam predicted the coming of Messiah, Numbers 24:17, he specifically said it would not be near or at hand. Was he saying, since we are told the emphasis in time statements is on certainty and not imminence, that coming of Messiah was UNCERTAIN!?

In other words, if statements of imminence signified certainty to the Biblical writers and prophets does it not therefore follow that statements of protraction or delay signify UNCERTAINTY OF FULFILLMENT? See also Daniel 10:1,14 in this same regard.

Now if it be insisted that these statements of DELAY actually DID signify temporal delay and not uncertainty, how in the name of consistency and logic can it then be insisted that statements indicting imminence do not signify temporal nearness but certainty? Would this not be arguing that words of delay are actual time words, but words of imminence are NOT ACTUAL TIME WORDS? The logical inference is that the only words of God that are temporally significant are those that said He would NOT act quickly!

5. When Daniel realized the time for fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return from captivity was fulfilled he set his face to God and prayed. The gist of his prayer was, "Lord the time predicted is fulfilled, when do we go home?" Can it actually be believed that as Daniel contemplated Jeremiah's prophecy about when Israel would return home that he was not concerned with WHEN, only certainty?

6. When Daniel received his vision that encompassed the time of Great Tribulation and the Resurrection, 12:1ff, he heard one angel ask another, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" vs,6, and a time answer was given. Shall we discount the time factor here and speak only of certainty? Was the angel asking about "When" for his sake, or for Daniel's? Are angels concerned about time and man is not?

7. In Acts 1:6 the disciples asked, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom?" They knew that God had promised for centuries to establish the kingdom. The disciples were inquiring if the time for fulfillment had come. Certainty had been established in the previous prophecies, now they want to know the WHEN of the CERTAINTY.

8. Jesus, Matthew 24, predicted the fall of Jerusalem. The disciples immediately asked, "When shall these things be?" Was not Jesus' prediction of the destruction a statement of certainty? The disciples are convinced of the certainty of the event, they wanted to know WHEN THE CERTAIN EVENT WOULD HAPPEN!

9. In Luke 19 Jesus told a parable illustrating that He had to return to the Father to receive the kingdom before returning in the kingdom. Why did He have to tell this parable? Because the multitude "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" vs.11. Was the multitude not concerned about the temporal imminence of the kingdom? They had heard Jesus say, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Was Jesus not indicating genuine imminence in these words? If Jesus was not signifying true imminence, and not just certainty, wherein was He any different from any other prophet? All the other prophets had declared the CERTAINTY of the coming kingdom; but here is a significant point: not one of them had ever before said the kingdom was at hand! Jesus was not only declaring the certainty of the kingdom, He was truly declaring its imminence.

10. In I Peter 1:11 Peter tells us the Old Covenant prophets diligently inquired into the salvation they wrote about. What did they want to know about it? They were "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating." Brother Dubois insists that since the word "time" here is "kairos" meaning "a suitable time, the right moment, a favorable moment" that the prophets were "seeking NOT that point of time in chronological time, but the most suitable circumstances for the coming suffering of their Messiah." 3 (footnote) Unfortunately for brother Dubois, time is not excluded from proper circumstances in kairos. The very definition he gives, and properly so, says kairos is the right TIME! Kairos is a time word! Thus, the prophets were concerned about the TIME when Messiah would come and suffer. We repeat, certainty they already had because of the very nature of the promise of God, Hebrews 6:17-18; but TIME THEY DID NOT KNOW AND TIME IS WHAT THEY ASKED ABOUT!

It should be apparent that the prophets and Jews were indeed concerned about the TIMING for the fulfillment of God's promises. Let us now investigate brother Dubois' contention that time words expressed certainty rather than imminence.

Time - vs - Certainty

How does God communicate certainty? Does He do it by using words that indicate an event would happen in a certain time frame and yet not do it within the indicated time frame? When He promised to destroy Jerusalem by the Babylonians He said it was "at hand." The Jews did not believe; they said it was not imminent, Ezekiel 11. But God said it would happen in their generation, 12:22ff. Now had God not done what He said, WHEN HE SAID HE WOULD, would that have indicated certainty?

Certainty is established by words such as "will," "surely," "truly," "without fail," etc. The TIME of the certain happening is established by "shortly" or "long time." The certainty of predictions is not established by a history of saying something is at hand when actually it is not. It is not established by saying something is far away and then it happens soon. Certainty is only established when the meanings of words communicated are fulfilled. Certainty is only communicated in "shortly" if the predicted event certainly comes shortly! If an event is predicted to happen shortly and does not transpire, certainty is negated and doubt reigns. Indeed, "Hope that is deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" Proverbs 13:12. Strangely, however, while we recognize this principle in our dealings with men, we say God is different!

Remember, God is faithful, II Peter 3:9. "God is not man that he should lie," Numbers 23:19. But faithfulness not only involves doing WHAT has been promised, it means doing it WHEN IT WAS PROMISED. Amillennialists have recognized this in regard to the imminent kingdom, Mark 1:15. They have correctly insisted, "If the kingdom did not come in that first century generation, the Spirit of truth has become the Spirit of falsehood."4 (footnote) If that is true in regard to the kingdom why is it not equally true in regard to the parousia? God's faithfulness demands He keep the time demands of His own predictions.

Brother Dubois correctly notes, "God's communication methods are not illogical and capricious.5 (footnote) We have already noted his insistence that God communicates in "the languages of humanity;" and is to be understood as if he were "conversing with another" [man, DKP]. How true!

Does man use terms of imminence when actually he means periods of long, indefinite delay? When men say something will happen soon, do they mean it may not happen for centuries, even millenniums? When men DO say something is imminent and the event does not happen shortly we say the man who made the promise was mistaken, a liar, a failure or a charlatan! Why is it any different with God since He communicates as if He were communicating man to man?!? While God is the "God of all history" and is above time, He must communicate with man who is inextricably linked to history and time. The Bible is not a dialogue between the transcendent God and transcendent man! It is the communication of the transcendent God with man who is totally ignorant of "God language" and must therefore be spoken to in his own language.

To appeal to the transcendence of God as an escape from God's use of words of imminence is to reject the argument that God talks to man in man's language. However, to acknowledge that the transcendent God communicates in man's

language acknowledges He knows how to communicate with His creation and does so in understandable words. Which is more consistent, that God speaks in man's words while having a hidden agenda of unfathomable transcendent meaning, or that the Great God communicates in words man can and is expected to properly understand and act upon?

Summary

We believe we have demonstrated that the Jews and their prophets were indeed concerned, deeply concerned about WHEN the prophecies of God would be fulfilled. When you stop and think about it, if they were not concerned about time they would be the only people who have ever lived that were unconcerned about when they were going to get great things!?! What child has ever been more concerned about the CERTAINTY of getting a present than WHEN he was going to get it? If I tell you that you are going to get a million dollars are you not concerned about WHEN?!? It is simply not normal human nature to be unconcerned about the time when things will happen!

Further, we believe we have shown that brother Dubois' own words about how God communicates and the meaning of words, clearly contradict his own belief about time statements. He correctly asserts that God talks in man's words; he believes we are to understand words in their normal sense unless context demands otherwise. This being true, and we could not agree more, it is abundantly clear that "at hand" truly means "at hand"; a "long time" means a "long time."

We ask, upon what basis do futurists strip an entire body of passages that indicate imminence of their normal and natural meaning? Strangely, when they find a passage they think teaches a delay in the parousia they insist it must actually mean a long time. (Although they are very careful not to make the delay too long if the subject of the delay is the kingdom). But when a text unequivocally asserts the imminence of the Lord's coming they say time does not mean anything to God. It seems to this writer that the only passages retaining any semblance of temporal significance to the futurists are those which speak of the imminence of the kingdom, or those that indicated a delay in the parousia. The rest have been completely stripped of temporal significance and "elasticized," "spiritualized," or redefined as meaning "certain."

Perhaps it is time serious students of the Bible acknowledge that the Jews and the prophets cared more about time than we have allowed, and that WE TODAY acknowledge the significance of the time statements of the inspired scriptures.

1. Footnotes -----

2. The God of All History, Paul DuBois, 5001 Trails Edge Drive, Arlington, Texas 56017, 1989 publication, price \$15.00, p.2. While we very vigorously disagree with brother Dubois' book we nonetheless appreciate the tenor of his writing. He is not caustic and omits the name calling all too prevalent in some other books written against Realized Eschatology. His book also takes a more scholarly approach than most others.
3. Ibid., p.21.
4. Ibid., p.4.
5. Robert Taylor, The Bible Doctrine of Final Things, Lambert Book House, Box 4007 Shreveport, Louisiana, 71104, 1977, p.128.
6. Dubois, p.21.

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