

EXPOSING FUTURIST “SCHEMES” OF INTERPRETING THE N.T. IMMINENT TIME TEXTS

– Lindsey, Smith, Courson, MacArthur, Ridderbos, Walvoord, Ice,
Jeffry, Gentry, Sproul, Hanegraaff, Beale, etc...

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The concept that the second coming would occur in Jesus’ **“this generation,”** or that the Book of Revelation is a prophecy about **“...things which must shortly take place”** (Rev. 1:1) during the time of John, don’t at first register with us because of what we have been taught by popular T.V. preachers and contemporary newspaper “prophecy expert” authors. These teachers and books must be the truth (we reason), because after all they are on the T.V. and radio and their books fill the shelves of all the contemporary Christian book stores--right? And yet these imminent time statements are as clear as a bell for anyone willing to accept them with humility and attentive study--honestly allowing the Bible to interpret itself. The purpose of this article is to briefly summarize and refute the various approaches of interpreting the imminent New Testament time texts from a wide variety of eschatological positions.

The “Our generation will be the generation that sees the Lord’s return” “schemes” of -- Hal Lindsey, Grant Jeffry, Chuck Smith, Jon Courson, etc.

1) **“Our generation will be the generation that sees the Lord’s return” “scheme.”**

Hal Lindsey popularized the idea that Christ had promised to return in our generation in His book *The Late Great Planet Earth*,

“The most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel. Even the figure of speech ‘fig tree’ has been a historic symbol of national Israel. When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the ‘fig tree’ put forth its first leaves. Jesus said that this would indicate that He was ‘at the door,’ ready to return. Then He said, ‘Truly I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all these things take place**’ (Matthew 24:34, NASB). What generation? Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so.”

One of my former Pastors as a new believer (Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel), followed Lindsey’s prophetic calculations, and wrote that he believed our generation will

“...be the generation that sees the Lord’s return. I believe that the generation of 1948 is the last generation. Since a generation of judgment is forty years and the Tribulation period lasts seven years, I believe the Lord could come back for His Church any time before the Tribulation starts, which would mean any time before 1981. (1948 + 40 – 7 = 1981).”^[1]

Smith has a history of this kind of sensationalistic manipulation,

“In Chuck Smith’s Revelation commentary *Dateline Earth* he informed his readers in 1989 that “the rapture **is at hand.**” Earlier he wrote, “**Very soon** there are going to be some strange and terrible things happening on this planet of ours.” These “very soon” happenings are based on his reading of

Revelation. He reinforces this claim when he argues emphatically, “*Jesus is coming back, and He’s coming back soon.*” In his book *The Final Curtain*, he writes, “It is later than you think. It is time to wake up from your lethargy and realize that the coming of the Lord is *at hand.*”^[2]

For “prophecy teachers” like Chuck Smith and Hal Lindsey, the rapture or second coming is only really imminent for our generation whom allegedly witnessed the “super sign” of the Jews returning to their land in 1948 as allegedly being the fulfillment of O.T. prophecy. When Smith says Jesus is coming “soon” he means it literally, but somehow when the N.T. authors claim this, we shouldn’t interpret these time texts so literally! In 1997, Lindsey wanted to keep a good thing going for his book sales so once again he started claiming that through his prayers, the Holy Spirit was giving him special insights into the Book of Revelation in order “to crack the Apocalypse Code.” Apparently, these were insights only recently given to the Church through him of course. Lindsey claims God had not given previous generations the insights he had been given that related to the issue of imminence because the time of fulfillment was *only now drawing near for us.*^[3]

Jon Courson is another very influential Calvary Chapel Pastor who instead of exposing Lindsey’s and Smith’s false predictions, decided he wanted to get into the prophetic game too and see if he could salvage the system. He admits, “1981 came. So did 1982, ’83, ’84, ’85, and ’86. And then something began to happen. A whole bunch of radical Christians began to *cool off*, saying, “Maybe we’re here for a while after all. Maybe we shouldn’t be so committed to this kingdom thing.” Oh, they didn’t say it in those exact words, but that’s what they were thinking. And *a dulling* of expectancy swept over our generation.”^[4] Courson decided Jesus’ “this generation” prediction was actually a period of 51 years and not 40, so 1999 became the new target date, “Thus, scripturally, there is validity for a Biblical generation to be 51.4 years.” (ibid., p. 179).

2) “God’s week of human history is rapidly coming to completion” “scheme.”

Grant Jeffrey another self acclaimed “prophecy expert” writes, “We could look for the beginning of the seventh day (the Millennium—a thousand years of peace, Revelation 20:2-6) to commence in the fall of the year 2000 on the fifteenth of Tishri, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles—exactly two thousand years from Christ’s birth.”^[5]

Chuck Smith jumped on this prophetic band wagon as well in the pulpit and indirectly in his commentary on Revelation where he completely avoids the time texts in the beginning of Revelation and finally at Revelation 22:6-7, gives a one sentence comment, “...the Bible says, “*one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (2 Peter 3:8). So, it’s been a couple of days—**almost!**”^[6]

This view teaches that a day = a 1,000 years and thus the following prophetic equation emerges: 4,000 years (earth’s alleged age) + 2,000 years (since the time of Christ) = the earth’s age nearing 6,000. Therefore, many prophecy pundits speculated and continue to speculate that sometime around A.D. 2000 Christ would or still will return and propel the earth into a literal Sabbath rest. This rest is allegedly accomplished with Christ’s return and He establishes his reign in literal Jerusalem for another literal 1,000 years (Rev. 20). One would think Chuck had learned his lesson, but he even went on to write a forward to *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary* where Courson continues the tradition of Lindsey and Smith and not only predicts the year 1999 as Christ’s return, but also adds the day=1,000 years calculation as well. Here are some selective quotes, “When is the seven thousandth year? When will Christ return? Thus, the calculation is complete:

Day 1	Adam is created	4000 B.C.
Day 4	The coming of Jesus Christ	A.D. 1
Days 5–6	Israel goes through hard times	A.D. 1–2000
Day 7	Israel revived during millennium	A.D. 2000

I am not alone in this interpretation.” “**God’s week of human history is rapidly coming to completion. The return of Christ is nigh. I believe you who are in your teens and early twenties are very possibly the last generation.** Set your heart on things above. Live for heaven. Seek first the kingdom, and you will be happy

presently, rewarded eternally, and grateful constantly. You who are older, continue setting an example for us who are younger. Continue to make the Lord top priority in your life. We're looking to you in a very real sense. Please keep the fire hot. **Fellow baby boomers, we need to realize that Jesus Christ is coming soon.** We don't have time to play around. We don't have time to chase worldly pursuits any longer. We need to return to ministry and service, worship and prayer, Bible study and street witnessing. **Whatever it was you used to do when you were fired up about Jesus in the '70s, do it again.** Maranatha!"¹⁷

In Smith's forward to Courson's work, he likens these kind of statements to being "Holy Spirit led" teachings. He actually parallels Jon Courson's teaching methods with the sound teaching methods of Nehemiah whose instruction "brought great conviction upon the people and a genuine turning to God. The ultimate result was that the people went their way rejoicing because they understood the words that were declared unto them." And writes, "I am convinced that you also will go your way rejoicing after reading the insights that the Holy Spirit has given to Jon on the scriptures."

But Christians don't go away "rejoicing" after listening to these false "Holy Spirit led" prophets, they go away in total disillusionment and their faith "dulled" and on ice—as admitted by Courson himself! Instead of repenting, these "prophecy experts" just reformulate their prophetic calculations and continue to stretch out the meaning of "this generation" just like the last days cults of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. This is the main "distinctive" of the "growth" and "success" of these cults, and is the same and main "distinctive" to the "growth" of the Calvary Chapel movement – selah.

3) *"We are living in the last days and age of church history (the church of Philadelphia) "scheme."*

Hal Lindsey and Chuck Smith continue their quest of trying to predict that Christ is coming sometime soon in our lifetime by speculating on the seven churches in Revelation, "The "seven churches" *symbolically* speak of completeness. I believe that in these messages we have a picture of the complete church history." (Smith, *Revelation*, pp. 24-25, emphasis added). It is interesting that Smith insists on a "literal" dispensational hermeneutic and normally rejects a "spiritual interpretation," stating, "When you spiritualize the scriptures you remove any authority or teaching from them, because every man is free to interpret the spiritual allegory as he desires." (ibid., pp. 10-11). I guess its okay to spiritualize these seven literal first century churches to mean they represent church history – when you want to continue *selling* the idea that we are living in the final generation and living in the final age of church history which allegedly will see Christ's return! Let's briefly examine Smith's "scheme" which is Hal Lindsey's as well. What follows is a combination of Smith and Lindsey's position taken from Smith's commentary on Revelation and Lindsey's book *There's a New World Coming: An In-Depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation*, p. 38:

- 1) **Ephesus** - Is "symbolic" of "...**the early church**, the apostolic church that existed up until the time of the death of John (c.99 A.D.)." (ibid., p.32, emphasis added). Lindsey sees this as the apostolic church.
- 2) **Smyrna** – Is "symbolic" of **the church in the "second to fourth centuries"** and allegedly follows the church of Ephesus historically (ibid., p.32). Lindsey sees this as the church persecuted by the Roman emperors.
- 3) **Pergamos** – Is "symbolic" of the church "the development of the **church-state system under Constantine in 316 A.D.** It was the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church." (ibid., p.38). Lindsey sees this as the church during 312-590 A.D.
- 4) **Thyatira** – Is "symbolic" apparently of "part of **the church**" that "**will be going through the Great Tribulation.**" (ibid., p.39). Lindsey sees this the church during 590-1517 A.D.
- 5) **Sardis** - Is "symbolic" of the Protestant church which didn't reform enough (ibid. p. 41). Lindsey sees this as **the church during 1517-1750 A.D.**
- 6) **Philadelphia** – Is "symbolic" of "...God's faithful church in the last days. God help us that **we would be the church of Philadelphia.**" (ibid., p.42). Apparently this church escapes the coming tribulation. Lindsey sees this as the church during 1750-1925 A.D. .
- 7) **Laodicia** – Is "symbolic" of "...the apostate church of the last days." (ibid., p.44). Lindsey sees this as the church of 1900 A.D. until the tribulation.

Pastor Chuck Smith is convinced that his futuristic interpretation of the Book of Revelation is superior to others because, “You don’t have to **start twisting things to make them fit here and there, and changing them to fit *some scheme*.**” (ibid., p.11, emphasis added). *Sounds to us that Smith’s interpretation of Revelation isn’t so “literal” and in fact he has no problem spiritualizing texts when it fits his “twisted scheme” to convince our generation that it will see the rapture of the church.* Others who have popularized this sensationalistic and arbitrary approach to the Book of Revelation would be Scofield in his “study Bible” claiming the 7 churches are “**prophetic, as disclosing seven phases of the spiritual history of the church from, say, 96 to the end.**”^[8] Of course, the adherents of this view do not always agree. Since time and history moves on, it becomes necessary for the proponents of this view to make up new divisions of the seven ages, thus the disagreements will continue. *Isn’t it amazing how these people are all too often unable to think of themselves as living at any other time than during the climax of history?*

It’s not Smith noticing that there were other churches to whom John could have written to or that 7 represents the number for completion that I object to. Indeed others such as Amillennialists and Postmillennialists have claimed these seven churches *spiritually represent* the entire church age, or even the Old Testament history of Israel leading up to A.D. 70 (Chilton, *Vengeance*, pp. 86-89). It’s Smith’s and Lindsey’s charismatic and dispensational arrogance which postulates their Spirit filled ability to interpret the Book of Revelation literally and applying its time of fulfillment has come upon our generation which is exegetically troubling. For example Lindsey writes,

“The Spirit of God gave me a special insight, not only into how John described what he actually experienced, but also into how this whole phenomenon encoded the prophecies so that they could be fully understood *only* when their fulfillment drew near.”^[9]

However, the icing on the cake is when their predictions don’t come true and there is no genuine humility and repentance but simply a heading back to the drawing board in hopes of generating another prophetic scenario that applies to Christ’s imminent coming in our generation. This continues to be ***the main Calvary Chapel “distinctive”*** that has caused the growth of Smith’s “Jesus movement” – newspaper eschatology! It is usually claimed that the Churches contemporary worship, openness to the Holy Spirit, and sound Bible teaching are the main “distinctives” of the growth of Calvary Chapel. However, it does not matter how much one teaches from the Bible if one’s theology is distorted! And when one seeks to confront Smith and others within Calvary Chapel in love on the doctrines of grace or eschatology, they cannot be challenged because their movement is “spirit led” while other churches emphasize “dry doctrine” and “theology” and quench the Holy Spirit. Yet we need to persist in holding these men accountable for their “Spirit filled” Bible teachings. The “Spirits movement” and sensationalistic and prophetic speculations of fulfillment for our contemporary generation are again, key elements of the growth of the Last Days cults! Having grown up in this church for years and studied to be a Pastor within this system, I can honestly say this is the main distinctive of the growth of Calvary Chapel’s across the United States. This is not to say there aren’t some good elements of the movement, but they are few and far in-between.

We have looked at how futurists twist 2 Peter 3:8 to allegedly teaching a prophetic scenario in which, “God’s week of human history is rapidly coming to completion. ***The return of Christ is nigh.***” But now we will take a look at how some twist this text to the opposite extreme—“Christ could delay His return another 2,000 years.” We go from this text teaching imminence in our generation, to it allegedly teaching the imminent time texts in the New Testament simply mean nothing at all.

4) “One day with the Lord is as a thousand years...”—Herman Ridderbos and John MacArthur

This is probably the most common text appealed to in order to get rid of the issue of the imminent time texts in the New Testament. Peter begins 2 Peter 3 by stating that what follows is a “**reminder**” to what he had written in 1 Peter! Therefore, the second coming, reception and inheritance of the kingdom and glory, the judgment of the living and the dead, and the “end of all things” being “at hand” *are now subjects Peter is going to continue to discuss in this chapter in the form of inheriting the kingdom but described as the new creation.*

It is alleged that this is the *only text* in the New Testament that turns the plethora of clear time texts to total and complete irrelevance, “There is no doubt that in the New Testament the nearness of the end is limited to one generation. But this error of perspective (“*Perspektivenirrtum*”), which is corrected in only **one place** of the New Testament (2Pet. 3:8)...”^[10] Any student of hermeneutics knows one is never to build a doctrine off of one verse of the Bible especially when it contradicts an overwhelming amount of very clear passages! And if Peter is here trying to change the meaning of “at hand” (1Pet.4:7) to possibly mean thousands of years, then why don’t we find Paul or any of the other New Testament writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit giving such contradictory qualifiers as Ridderbos claims Peter is now doing in 2 Peter 3:8?

Similarly to Ridderbos, Kistemaker decides the time texts in Revelation should be understood as an “ideal” and “symbolically” interpreted as “...the meaning of eschatological time, expressed not in chronological periods, but in terms of principle” (*WSTTB?*, p.238). Kistemaker is clearly trying his best to hide behind a very vague and pathetic vocabulary because he knows he has no lexical support for these kinds of comments!

Another of my former Pastor’s and my Bible College President—John MacArthur, cites many of the imminent time texts in the New Testament along with 2 Peter 3:8 and concludes,

“...therefore the fact that 2,000 years have elapsed is utterly irrelevant to the doctrine of Christ’s imminent return. Christ’s coming is still imminent.” And, “The day is **still at hand**. There are no other events that must occur on the prophetic calendar before Christ comes to meet us in the air. He could come at any moment. And it is in *that* sense that Christ’s coming is imminent. In the very same sense, His coming was imminent even in the days of the early church. I suppose it is *also* possible that Christ **could delay** His coming **another 2,000 years or longer.**”^[11]

Commenting on James 5:8, MacArthur writes,

“There is **no ambiguity** about this language...” concerning the imminent return of Jesus because it is “...something that might be expected at **any time.**”^[12]

This is very disturbing because the writer to the Hebrews says of the second coming of Christ, “**For yet a very little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry**” (Heb.10:37) and MacArthur tells us that Christ **has delayed** (“tarried”) His coming 2000 years and that, “it is possible that Christ **could delay** (“tarry”) **His coming another 2,000 years or longer.**” Of course the reader is to believe MacArthur over the writer to the Hebrews and understand that there is no “ambiguity” with MacArthur’s interpretation of the imminent New Testament time texts?!? We need to ask the serious question at this point of, “How does the Bible as a whole deal with time texts and those whom claim God will delay these imminent promises thousands of years?”

In the Old Testament, God was very angry when mockers would come denying and twisting His time texts and change “near” predictions to become “far off” ones! Any good cross reference or commentary will point to (Ezk.7:5-10; 12:22-28) to ironically interpret 2 Peter 3:8 which ends up refuting and condemning their futuristic interpretation of the text! Even futurist commentaries acknowledge that one of the sins of the false prophets and apostates of Ezekiel’s day was not that they denied a coming judgment, but that they sought to change the meaning of “at hand” to “far off.” “...**here formalists do not go so far as to deny that a day of evil is coming, but assert it is still far off** (Am 6:3).”^[13]

The *application* of God’s Word here is firm and clear to the futurist who seeks to twist His time texts into fitting their futurist interpretations. Even reformed futurist Gary DeMar comments on the parallels of Ezekiel’s prophecy with that of Jesus, “Ezekiel’s description of the imminent destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem parallels what happened to Israel after the ascension and enthronement of Jesus. A warning of impending doom had been given to the nation. Many ignored the warning and died in the conflagration that came upon the city in A.D.70, on generation after Jesus pronounced His judgment (Matthew 24:14, 34; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:1, 3).” And , “Based on the way “quickly,” “near,” and “shortly” are used in Genesis through Revelation, *any student of the Bible who does not interpret these time texts to mean anything other than close at hand is in jeopardy of **denying the integrity of the Bible.***”^[14]

Men such as Richard Pratt and John MacArthur^[15] have attempted to refute us by arguing from 2 Peter 3:9, that God has postponed or delayed His second coming because of His attribute of being “merciful” and “longsuffering” towards sinners. It is also argued by these men that the Great Commission hasn’t been fulfilled and is thus another reason God has “delayed” some 2,000+ years and counting. However, God indeed was longsuffering and merciful towards the last days “this generation” of (A.D. 30-70) and the commandment of the Great Commission had already been fulfilled before A.D.70:

PROPHECY

FULFILLMENT

<p>“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the <u>world</u> (Greek <u>oikumene</u>) for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14)</p>	<p>“But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to <u>all the earth</u>, and their words to the ends of the <u>world</u> (Greek <u>oikumene</u>)” (Romans 10:18)</p>
<p>“And the gospel must first be published among <u>all nations</u> (Greek <u>ethnos</u>)” "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, (Greek <u>ethnos</u>)..." “...I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, <u>even to the end of the age.</u>" Amen.” (Mark 13:10; Mt.28:19-20)</p>	<p>“...My gospel... has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures <u>has been made known to all nations</u> (Greek <u>ethnos</u>)...” (Romans 16:25-26)</p>
<p>“And He said to them, ‘Go into <u>all the world</u> (Greek <u>kosmos</u>) and preach the gospel to every creature” “...And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues (Greek <u>glossa</u>) (Mark 16:15, 17)</p>	<p>“...of the gospel, which <u>has come to you</u>, as it has also in <u>all the world</u> (Greek <u>kosmos</u>), as is bringing forth fruit...,” (Colossians 1:5-6).</p>
<p>And he said unto them ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to <u>every creature</u> (Greek <u>kitisis</u>) “ (Mark 16:15)</p>	<p>“...from the gospel which you heard, which <u>was preached to every creature</u> (Greek <u>kitisis</u>) under heaven, of which I, Paul became a minister” (Colossians 1:23)</p>
<p>“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the <u>end of the earth/land</u> (Greek <u>ge</u>)” (Acts 1:8). Prophecy had begun to be fulfilled: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues (Greek <u>glossa</u>), as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling <u>in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation</u> (Greek <u>ethnos</u>) <u>under heaven.</u></p>	<p>“But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound <u>has gone out to all the earth/land</u> (Greek <u>ge</u>), and their words to the ends of the world” (Romans 10:18) Prophecy would be fulfilled “shortly” : “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that <u>dwell on the earth/land</u> (Greek <u>ge</u>), and to every nation (Geek <u>ethnos</u>), and kindred (Greek <u>phule</u>) and tongue (Greek <u>glossa</u>), and people, (Greek <u>laos</u>)” (Rev.1:1; Rev.14:6). See also Revelation 10:6-7; 20:3; 22:10-11 in regards to the Great Commission success to the “nations” and imminent fulfillment of the Great Commission motif.</p>

The concept of God’s “longsuffering” does not necessitate a 2,000+ year “delay” of Christ’s return! The text clearly says God would **not** be slow or delay as stated in Heb.10:37! Allowing Scripture to interpret itself, His “longsuffering” was directed towards sinners living in and coming to repentance *within a very specific time frame—their--“this generation” and no other!*

Our text is very clear that God was **not willing** (Gk. *Boulomai*) that His elect and in context, the “beloved” Jewish and gentile, “any” and “all” should perish. This is the strongest word in the Greek language to communicate **the determinative will of God**. Peter’s theology is consistent—God would NOT delay or be slow and His decretive will to save and judge sinners in an “at hand” “ready” “be saved from this crooked and perverse generation” time frame—occurred **as planned** (1 Pet. 1:4-12; 4:5, 7, 17; Acts 2:40)! To argue any other way is to align oneself with the mockers of Peter’s day, deny inspiration, adopt a liberal view of interpreting Scripture, and deny one’s own Calvinism—of which Pratt and MacArthur claim to teach Selah. Peter goes on to say that God’s longsuffering was “salvation.” None of God’s elect that He had sovereignly foreordained unto eternal life “perished” or were “appointed to wrath” in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70.

Although Mathison seeks to portray Daniel’s prophecy as shrouded in mystery and very difficult to understand, it is admitted by virtually everyone that Daniel 2, 7, 9, and 12 are chapters addressing Israel’s last days and refer to the reception of the Messianic Kingdom and the general resurrection and judgment at Christ’s second coming. Therefore, we need to ask the straightforward question of, “Why was Daniel given a literal time frame of fulfillment while it is alleged that John is given the same prophecy with a non-literal time frame”?

Did God change His method of telling time between Daniel & John concerning the same subject matter?	
DANIEL WAS TOLD: 1• “Seal up the vision”	JOHN WAS TOLD: 1• “Don’t seal up...”
2• Why? “the appointed time was long...” and 3• “...the vision refers to <u>many days</u> yet to come.” (Dan. 10:1;14)	2• Why? “...for the time is <u>at hand.</u> ” 3• “...for the time is <u>near</u> (Rev. 22:10 & 1:3)
4• Daniel was told that he would not live to see this prophecy fulfilled. (Dan. 12:13)	4• John was told that he could live to see the prophecy fulfilled. (Mat. 16:27-28, Mat. 10:22-23; Mat. 24:34; Jn. 21:18-22)

God who rules over time apparently had no problem communicating to Daniel who was bound by time, that this prophecy wouldn’t be fulfilled until a "long time" either in referring to a typological fulfillment prior to A.D. 70, or referring to A.D. 70 specifically. Indeed the time of the fulfillments didn’t come until some hundreds of years from the time Daniel received the visions. God’s time phrase of a "long time" was related to Daniel in the terms of his physical life span. Since some 300+ years was well beyond his life span, it was a "long time" away. In Revelation, **John is told the opposite of Daniel, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near"** (Rev. 22:10). God’s time phrases of "near," "shortly," "quickly," and "at hand," to John and the seven churches which were in Asia were promises also related to their life spans. John and the other disciples were promised that some of them would live to see these things come to pass in their generation (Matt. 16:28; 24:34, Jn. 21:18-22).

Both visions of Daniel and John (and the prophecies in Peter’s epistles) deal with the kingdom, the second coming of Christ in judgment, the tribulation, and the resurrection of the dead. According to the futurist, the time is still "near" for John’s vision to take place even though it has been some 2000+ years since John had his vision. Why would God now change His way of communicating the time of the fulfillment of Daniel’s and John’s visions concerning the same subject matter? The answer is that He didn’t. At the time when Daniel had his visions which included the second coming of Christ and His kingdom, the time of its designated fulfillment, AD 70, really referred to “many days yet to come.” When John had His vision concerning the second coming of Christ and His kingdom, it was only seven or fewer years away. Therefore, "a long time"

meant a long time and "near" really did mean NEAR! Although reformed theologians such as John Lightfoot and Gary DeMar are very inconsistent in trying to harmonize their preterism, with their creedal confessions, I would agree with such statements as this, "John Lightfoot, in a sermon on Revelation 20:1-2, concludes that 'where Daniel ends John begins, and goes no farther back, and where John begins Daniel ends, and goes no farther forward. For *Daniel sheweth the state and persecutors of the Church of the Jews, from the building of Jerusalem by Cyrus, to the destruction of it by Titus, and he goes no farther.*'"¹⁶¹

5) "When Jesus decides to come then He will come really fast"—John Walvoord and Thomas Ice

Thomas Ice and John Walvoord have sought to interpret the time texts in Revelation as meaning, "When Jesus decides to come then He will come quickly." In other words "shortly" and "quickly" are only referring to *the manner or mode* in which He comes – whenever that will be. This is like me calling the police or fire department in an emergency and they tell me, "Don't worry, we will be there "shortly" "quickly" and are already very "near" even at your very door!" But when they pull up *a week later* after my house has burnt down I say, "I thought you were coming "quickly" and they reply, "Well, what we meant was when we decided to come, then we would come quickly at that point."¹⁷¹ None of the translations I have consulted give this meaning.

The Book of Revelation is filled with a contemporary first century group of Christians experiencing persecution and martyrdom in which Jesus comforts them by explaining He will return "soon" and in a "little while" to vindicate them from their first century persecutors and give them "relief" at His appearing from these Jewish persecutors – their "countrymen," the Pharisees, or the "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 6:10-11; Mt. 23:30-36, Mt. 23-24; 1Thess. 2:14-16/2Thess. 1:6-7). Gentry quoting James Moffatt, correctly states of this view, "To interpret this passage to mean that some two or three thousand years in the future Jesus will come with great rapidity would be a mockery of their historical circumstances." Surely "this is the hinge and staple of the book. When the advent of Jesus is hailed as a relief, it is no consolation to say that the relief will come suddenly; sudden or not, it must come soon (v. 7), if it is to be of any service."¹⁸¹ Gentry is correct here, but his comments and quote of Moffatt contradict Gentry's futurist interpretation of the "relief" to be given the Thessalonian church in (2 Thess. 1:4-10). Jesus was either faithful to return in the imminent time frame He promised in order to give them relief from their first century persecutors or He didn't. It's really that simple.

6) "Jesus was saying His coming was a *certain* event to occur in the future – not that He would actually come for them 'soon.'"

Another cleverly imposed meaning of the time texts claims Jesus was only communicating that He would "certainly" come someday without having any temporal time frame in mind. If this is what Jesus was trying to communicate, there were Greek words He could have used instead of the *taxos*, *engus*, and *mello* word groups! Not only this, but it makes Jesus' words nonsensical and redundant, "He who testifies to these things says, "***Surely I am coming quickly***" (Rev. 22:20). With this futurist interpretation, Jesus is redundantly saying, "Surely I am coming surely" or He is trying to communicate "Surely I am coming certainly someday." If that is what He was trying to say, He would have just said that! But no, He assures His first century persecuted audience that "Surely" He was coming "quickly" to vindicate, give relief and reward them with Himself and the new creation.

7) "The time texts in Revelation are teaching the beginning of fulfillment was near not the consummation of fulfillment" - view G.K. Beale

Perhaps the latest trend and inventive "scholarly" approach from some futurists to avoid the obvious, is to claim the "inauguration" of fulfilled prophecy was genuinely "at hand" but not the consummation of the prophecy. G.K. Beale states, "The focus of "quickness" and "nearness" in vv 1-3 is primarily on inauguration of prophetic fulfillment and its ongoing aspect, not on nearness of consummated fulfillment..." And "Indeed, what follows shows that the beginning of fulfillment and not final fulfillment is the focus."¹⁹¹ This is so blatantly wrong; it's disturbing that a publisher even paid for these kinds of comments to go into print for the Christian public to read! Clearly, Jesus' second coming is described as being "at hand" and will "shortly"

come to pass from the beginning of Revelation to the end and His return is the “consummated fulfillment” of prophecy not the “inauguration” of prophecy (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20)!

8) *The imminent time texts in the New Testament “demand” a Preterist interpretation except when the general judgment and resurrection are the topics—Kenneth Gentry, R.C. Sproul, Hank Hanegraaff*

In Gentry’s debate with other futurists on the Book of Revelation he accurately states that “Revelation promises there will no longer be “delay” (10:6). The ad hoc nature of the book **demand**s a preterist approach.” And “Similar notes of the temporal proximity of divinely governed cries abound in the New Testament (see Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:16-20; Rom. 13:11-12; 16:20; 1Cor.7:26, 29-31; Col. 3:6; 1Thess.2:16; Heb. 10:25, 37; James 5:8-9; 1Pet.4:5, 7; 1John 2:17-18). **How else could the New Testament express nearness more clearly?**”^[20]

Apparently Gentry’s co-authors in *When Shall These Things Be?* do not know how to answer his question here and he himself can’t answer it when the resurrection and judgment of the dead is said to be something that is “at hand” or “about to” take place in the N.T. Hank Hanegraaff claims that we need to interpret the Bible using "synergy" or simply put "let the Bible interpret itself." He writes, "Scriptural synergy **demand**s that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture. Nor may we assign arbitrary meanings to words or phrases that have their referent in bible history." (Hank Hanegraaff, *ibid*, THE APOCALYPSE CODE, p. 9, emphasis added).

When time statements are connected to resurrection texts or imminent time text passages are inseparably connected thematically with resurrection texts using the analogy of Scripture principal of interpretation, these men do not “demand” a preterist interpretation, they demand a creedal interpretation and become exegetical cowards seeking to hang on to their financial contributors! They do not offer up their ministries to God in faith as Abraham offered up Isaac in obedience to God, but rather, they selectively screen preterist questions over their radio shows (Hanegraaf) or use a Roman Catholic "damn these heretics to hell" defense" of "Mother Church" to refute our position (Gentry/North). After being confronted with the truth, these men have become cowards and have rejected God's guidance for them and their ministries and instead have become ensnared with the fear of man and a desire to please men and not God. This has resulted in them being cowards to not publicly debate our position as well!

In Romans 8:18 Paul says, “***For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory about to be revealed in us***” (Rms.8:18YLT; cf. NSRV, AV, & WEY: “soon to be manifested”). The Greek word corresponding to “about to be” in Rom. 8:18 is *mello*. Reformed partial preterists such as R.C. Sproul and Kenneth Gentry understand the word *mello* in the book of Revelation to refer to Christ’s return in A.D.70. Sproul also says that it is not unreasonable to apply the imminence indicators in Roms.13:11-12 (“***...for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness...***”) to earlier chapters in Romans that do not explicitly have time texts. (Sproul, *Last Days*, pp. 99, 138-140). If *mello* is a time-indicator that needs to be honored, and we can apply the time texts in Rom. 13:11-12 to earlier chapters, then why ignore this approach in Romans eight? The claim that the teaching of “the” judgment and resurrection of the living and the dead was not given with imminence indicators directly tied to them is simply not true: “***Having hope toward God, which they themselves also wait for, that there is about to be a rising again of the dead, both of righteous and unrighteous***” and “***But when he dealt with the subjects of justice, self-control, and the judgment which was soon to come, Felix became alarmed...***” (Acts 24:15, YLT/WEY; 24:25, WEY/YLT, cf. Acts 17:31, YLT/WEY; WUESTNT).^[21]

Gary DeMar correctly points out that anyone denying the time texts is in jeopardy of denying the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture itself,

“...any student of the Bible who does not interpret these time texts to mean anything other than close at hand is in jeopardy of denying the integrity of the Bible.”^[22]

And as R. C. Sproul has suggested, any eschatology that denies the New Testament time texts has adopted a liberal or neo-orthodox view of God and time,

“When F.F. Bruce speaks of faith making the time be ‘at hand,’ this sounds all too much like Rudolf Bultmann’s famous theology of timelessness, which removes the object of faith from the realm of real history and consigns it to a supertemporal realm of the always present *hic et nunc*.”^[23]

Conclusion

We believe that any eschatological system that denies the imminent time texts of the New Testament concerning the second coming, the judgment, and the resurrection of the dead, has adopted a liberal view of God and time which does in fact end up denying (out of ignorance or not) the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. These views portray Christ not as the “Faithful and True Witness,” but as one who failed to keep His promise. Here at [Tree of Life Ministries](#), we do not believe in putting off hope into the future when Scripture teaches it is now realized within us. These other views have deferred hope and have made the church sick with their “twisted schemes” but we boldly declare that Christ—the Tree of Life has come, “*Hope deferred makes the heart sick* (futurism), *But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life* (preterism).” (Prov. 13:12; Rev. 21-22:6-7, 10-12, 20). I pray for my former Pastor’s Chuck Smith and John MacArthur that they will abandon their prophetic “schemes” and bow before the teachings of Scripture. The Reformed community also needs to stop talking about the abuses from these dispensationalists and admit they have invented “scholarly” “schemes” that have been weighed in the balances of Scripture and have been found to be wanting. The futurist approach to the imminent time texts of the N.T. is a “house divided” which cannot, nor will continue to stand against our view in public debate.

[1] Chuck Smith, *End Times*, p. 35 The Word for Today, 1978.

[2] Gary DeMar, *Chuck Smith’s Prophetic Confusion* <http://www.americanvision.org/articlearchive2007/11-20-07.asp> www.americanvision.org/ emphasis added.

[3] Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code*, back cover, p. 38, 1997, quoted by Hank Hanegraaff, *THE APOCALYPSE CODE*, p. xvi, Thomas Nelson, Pub., 2007.

[4] Courson, Jon: *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, 2003, S. 179, emphasis added.

[5] Francis X. Gumerlock, *the Day and the Hour Christianity’s Perennial Fascination with Predicting the End of the World*, pp. 319-322, American Vision Pub., 2000.

[6] Chuck Smith, *WHAT THE WORLD IS COMING TO A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p.213, The Word For Today Pub., 1977, 80, 93, 2001, emphasis added.

[7] Courson, Jon: *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, 2003, S. 179

[8] *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Oxford University Press, 1909, note on Rev. 1:20.

[9] Hank Hanegraaff, *THE APOCALYPSE CODE FIND OUT WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT THE END TIMES AND WHY IT MATTERS TODAY*, p. xvi, Nelson pub., 2007.

[10] Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, p. 453, P&R pub. 1962, emphasis MJS.

[11] John MacArthur, *THE SECOND COMING*, pp.57-58, Crossway Books Pub., 1999, emphasis added.

[12] MacArthur, *ibid*, p.204 emphasis added.

[13] JFB, Online Bible, emphasis added.

[14] Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p.296, *ibid*. emphasis added.

[15] John MacArthur, *ibid.*, pp.58, 213-215, *ibid.*

[16] Gary DeMar, *BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW MAGAZINE, The Prophecies of Daniel: Why They **Don't** Point to Us*, p.16, Vol. .23, #10 & 11, Oct / Nov. 2007, emphasis added. Once again DeMar fails to discuss Dan.12:1-7/Mt.13:39-43/Mt.24:15/Lk.21:22 in relationship to the fact that when the destruction of Jerusalem occurred, is when the resurrection would occur! Gary, do the prophecies of Daniel (including the resurrection) point to our future or don't they?

[17] Thomas Ice, Tim LaHaye, *THE END TIMES CONTROVERSY*, p.103, Harvest House Pub., 2003.

[18] Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, *ibid.*, p.139.

[19] G.K. Beale, *THE NEW INTERNATIONAL GREEK TESTAMENT COMMENTARY, The Book of Revelation*, p.182, Eerdmans Paternoster pub., 1999.

[20] Gentry, *FOUR VIEWS ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION*, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

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[22] Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness OBSESSION OF THE MODERN CHURCH*, p.393, American Vision, Atlanta, Georgia, 4th revised, 1999, emphasis added.

[23] R.C. Sproul, *THE LAST DAYS ACCORDING TO JESUS*, pp.108-109, Baker Books, 1998, emphasis added.