

Hal Lindsey Redux

By [Gary DeMar](#)



I received a number of emails from people objecting to my article on Hal Lindsey. This was to be expected. I pointed out how Lindsey has made several bad prophetic pronouncements and how he even admitted that if it turned out he was wrong that he would be a “bum.” I didn’t say this, Lindsey did. Lindsey turns out to be wrong, and I’m the bad guy.

Some maintained that I shouldn’t criticize other Christians. Where in the Bible does it say this? Paul opposed Peter “to his face, because he stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11). Skeptics of the Bible have used the prophetic pronouncements of date setters like Lindsey against the Christian faith. It’s time that Christians police their own by calling these prophetic prognosticators to account.

For those who are new to *American Vision*, bear in mind that I have tried to sit down with Lindsey and other prophecy writers to discuss these issues. Of course, I’m a nobody, so why should any of these guys take me seriously? I approached Lindsey through a mutual friend and a respected ministry to deal with the controversy of misapplied prophetic pronouncements. He was not interested.

One person, without name calling and irrational claims, sent me a series of questions to answer. He attended the *Defending the Faith* conference in Ft. Lauderdale, FL where I spoke with a number of other speakers such as Ken Ham of [Answers in Genesis](#). Although I’ve dealt with these questions in *Last Days Madness*, I decided to answer his questions directly. I hope you benefit by the exchange.

Phil,

I do not believe eschatology is a secondary issue. It is as important as the creation issue. Like creation, eschatology has cultural implications (see my book *Myths, Lies, and Half-Truths*). If you listened to Ken Ham’s message, you will remember that he addressed those Christians who consider the issue of origins to be a secondary issue. The gospels stand or fall on the creation story, as Ken pointed out. In the same way, the reliability of the NT stands or falls on what Jesus said about certain prophetic events and when they would be fulfilled.

Jesus made clear predictions about the timing of certain prophetic events. Liberals have used these supposed “failed predictions” (see Bertrand Russell’s *Why I am Not a Christian*) against the reliability of the gospels. Jesus said, “this generation” will not pass away until “all these things take place” (Mt. 24:34). Each and every time “this generation” is used in the gospels, it refers, without exception, to the generation to whom Jesus was speaking. Look up the phrase for yourself. Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 24:33: “Even so YOU too, when YOU see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.” A literal rendering would mean that Jesus was describing the generation to whom He was speaking, and the use of YOU would be a reference to the audience that was sitting in front of Him. He wasn’t speaking to the nation of Israel in general as Zechariah 9:9 does (see below).

Determining the original audience is extremely important when interpreting any piece of literature. This includes the Bible. Who is the “you” of 24:2?: “Do YOU not see these things?” The disciples were looking at the temple. The YOU is obviously them. Who is the YOU of 24:4?: “And Jesus answered and said to THEM, ‘See to it that no one misleads YOU.’” There is no way that the YOU in this passage refers to anyone other than those who were standing before Jesus. Jesus said, “Truly I say to YOU, not one stone HERE shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (24:2). It was that first-century temple that would be destroyed. No other temple or generation is in view.

The same is true of the use of YOU in 24:6 and 9. There is nothing in the text that intimates that Jesus has a future audience in mind, that He has somehow switched audience references from 24:2 and 4. If Jesus wanted to describe a different, future audience, He would have used THEY and THEM: “And THEY will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars” (24:6). . . . They will deliver THEM up to tribulation” (24:9).

I did not say “the use of the word ‘YOU’ always implies application to the immediate audience.” In the case of Matthew 24, the burden of proof is on those who claim the audience reference of YOU does not refer to Jesus’ first-century audience.

You state the following (all of these questions are answered in great detail in my book *Last Days Madness*):

1. This ‘abomination’ referred to by Christ was still a future event.

Of course it was a future event in A.D. 30, but it was fulfilled within a generation (Mt. 24:34). Luke states it like this: “But when YOU see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand” (Luke 21:20). Jerusalem was surrounded by armies prior to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

2. It is the same ‘abomination which Daniel spoke of in Dan. 12:11, according to Jesus in Matt. 24:15 and interestingly Daniel even attaches a specific number of days with this event 1,290 which is about half of a 7 year period and ties in with what John said in Rev. 12:6–8 talking about the exact same future event.)

John states in Revelation 1:1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants the things which must SHORTLY take place. . . .” In Revelation 1:3, we read: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is NEAR.” John writes that he is a “fellow-partaker in the tribulation” (1:9), the same tribulation that Jesus said would take place before “this generation” passed away (Mt. 24:34). In John 11:1, John is told to measure the temple. Since the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, this must be the temple before it was destroyed. This means that Revelation was written prior to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The burden of proof is on those who claim this is a reference to a rebuilt temple. There is not a single verse in the NT that says anything about a rebuilt temple. Yes, the OT does refer to a rebuilt temple. That temple was rebuilt (see Ezra and Nehemiah). The temple that Jesus said would be destroyed— “not one stone left upon another” (24:2)—was a rebuilt temple. In order for there to be another rebuilt temple, the NT would have to say something about it. It doesn’t. Revelation is describing the 3.5 year period leading up to the judgment of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Revelation doesn’t say a thing about a seven-year tribulation period. Revelation never uses “seven years.”

3. Therefore it cannot be the desolation that occurred under Antiochus Epiphanes which was 200 years before Jesus spoke these words, and it cannot be 70 AD because John wrote 2 decades after those events had occurred.

I never said that Matthew 24:15 is the abomination that occurred under Antiochus Epiphanes. There is no internal evidence that John wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem. As I pointed out under #2, John is told to measure the temple and the altar (11:1-2). You can’t measure something that does not exist, and the temple did not exist in A.D. 70. You can postulate a future rebuilt temple, but the text does not say that John measured “the REBUILT temple.” He is told to measure “THE temple.” If you are truly interested in when Revelation was written, I suggest you get Kenneth L. Gentry’s *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* and *The Beast of Revelation*.

4. So therefore, if the ‘YOU’ implied fulfillment to the immediate audience of Jesus day then:

1. When was the gospel of the kingdom preached in all of the world during their day (vs. 14)?

It’s obvious that you have not read much outside the ranks of dispensational authors. I’ve dealt with all the following questions in my books *Last Days Madness* and *End Times Fiction*, but I’ll briefly rehearse them here. Many people are tripped up on Matthew 24:14, mostly because of poor translations. Here’s the literal translation of the passage: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole inhabited earth or Roman empire for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.” The “end” spoken here is “the end of the age [*aion*]” (Mt. 24:3), not the end of the world [*kosmos*]. The “end of the age” was the end of the old covenant order, something that Paul wrote had “come upon” the people in his day: “Now these happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages HAVE COME” (1 Cor. 10:11). The word most often translated as “world” in Mt. 24:14 is not the Greek word *kosmos* but *oikoumene*, the same word that’s used in Luke 2:1. My translation translates Luke 2:1 this way: “Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth” [*oikoumene*]. It’s the same Greek word used in Mt. 24:14. The gospel of the kingdom only had to be preached as far as the census was taken at the time of Jesus’ birth. Since the census went no further than the Roman empire, we can conclude that the preaching of the gospel only had to go as far as the boundaries of the empire. Did it? The Bible says it did. In Colossians, Paul wrote that the gospel had been preached “in all the world” (1:6), “in all creation under heaven” (1:23). In Romans he wrote that the gospel “HAS BEEN made known to all the nations. . .” (16:26).

2. What ‘abomination’ stood in the holy place in 70 AD (vs. 15)?

It could several things, but since Luke tells us it happens when “Jerusalem [is] surrounded by armies” (Lk. 21:20), and this took place before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it is a past event for us. Your position assumes a rebuilt temple, but nothing is said in the NT about a rebuilt temple.

3. When did the great tribulation, which would be the worst the world has ever seen, occur during their life time (vs. 21)?

The tribulation of Mt. 24:21 is confined to the territory of Judea. Notice what Jesus says: “Then let those IN JUDEA flee to the mountains” (24:16). How can this be a world-wide conflagration when it can be escaped by fleeing to the mountains surrounding Jerusalem? It’s obvious that Jesus is describing events in His day, which fits the audience of YOU: housetops, cloaks, and Sabbath observance. Josephus records that more than 1 million Jews were killed during the siege of Jerusalem.

4. What false prophets and false christs arose during their day and showed great signs and wonders (vs. 24)?

You can’t be serious. The literature of the period is filled with examples. John writes: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because MANY FALSE PROPHETS have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Why test these false prophets unless they are doing things that might convince people that they are true prophets? Paul writes: “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). Peter writes: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Peter 2:1–2). Notice how Luke describes Simon in Acts: “Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from the smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts” (8:9-11). Also see Acts 21:38 (cf. Matt. 24:26). Josephus writes: “A false prophet was the occasion of these people’s destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God. . . .”

5. When did the coming of the Son of man occur in their day (vs. 27)?

Remember what Jesus said: “This generation will not pass away until ALL these things take place” (Mt. 24:34). This includes 24:27 and the “coming of the Son of Man.” This is the judgment coming of Jesus against Jerusalem that took place in A.D. 70. The language is no different from the way similar language is used in Isa. 19:1 and Micah 1:3-4. Jesus uses similar “coming” language in Revelation 2:5, 16 and 3:3. None of these “comings” refer to the second coming. They are judgment comings.

6. When did the sun turn dark and the moon stop shining and the stars fall from heaven during their day (vs. 29)?

When did the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down to Joseph (Gen. 37:5-11)? Are you saying that sometime during the Great Tribulation there will be a gigantic woman who will be “clothed with the sun, and the moon [will be] under her feet, and on her head [there will be] a crown of twelve stars” (Rev. 12:1)? I don’t know anyone who believes this will happen this way. Sun, moon, and stars symbolize Israel. The same is true in Mt 24:29. Jesus uses the language from Isaiah 13:10 and applies it to first-century Jerusalem. The actual sun, moon, and stars did not go black and fall when Babylon was destroyed, so why do we think that they will go black and fall when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70? This language is common throughout the OT describing the fall of nations.

7. The question the disciples asked at the beginning of the chapter dealt with future events (vs. 3), you cannot just selectively pick one verse from the chapter (v. 15) and say that He was referring to things happening in their day in this verse without being consistent throughout the chapter. Obviously such consistency shows the fault in saying that YOU must imply fulfillment in their day.

Of course Matthew 24:3 refers to future events from the perspective of Jesus’ disciples. The events of A.D. 70 were future for them but past for us. There is no indication in the rest of Mt. 24 that Jesus has a different audience in view. The second person plural is used consistently throughout the chapter. I’ve pointed this out above.

8. To prove the point about the word YOU:Matt. 23:39—Christ used ‘YOU’ speaking to Jews of his day but the implication is obviously referring to Jews of the future because those of His day did not say “Blessed ...etc.”

Notice what Jesus ACTUALLY said: “For I say to YOU, from now on YOU shall not see Me UNTIL YOU say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Mt. 23:39). There is nothing in this passage that refers “to Jews of the future.” He was talking to them. He uses YOU three times in one sentence. The use of “until” makes what Jesus said conditional (cf. Mt. 5:25; 18:30, 34; Acts 23:12). If they don’t say “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, then they will not see Jesus. There were many Jews between A.D. 30 and 70 who did acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (e.g., Acts 2:37-42).

9. II Thess. 2:1–4: Paul used the word ‘YOU’ talking to the Thessalonians about this future abomination’but obviously the implication was for Christians in the future, for if not then when was the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him (vs. 1) or the great apostasy (vs. 3) or the revealing of THE (definite article in Gk.) man of sin (vs. 3) or this son of perdition sitting in THE (Gk. def. art.) temple of God (vs. 4)?

I’ve written extensively on 2 Thess. 2 (see *Last Days Madness*, chaps. 22 and 23), so I’m not going to spend a great deal of time on it here. “Coming” is not always a reference to the “second coming,” as I pointed out in reference to Rev. 2:5, 16 and 3:3 (also see Isa. 19:1 and Micah 1:3-4). The use of YOU in 2 Thess. 2 can only refer to the Thessalonian Christians in Paul’s day. “Gathering together” is not a reference to the “rapture” (see John 11:47-53; Heb. 10:24-25—“assembling together” is a cognate of the Greek *sunagogue*, the same word used in 2 Thess. 2:1). The “man of lawlessness” was alive and well in Paul’s day. They knew what and who was restraining him (2:6-7). Since he was being restrained in their day, then he must have been alive in their day: “And YOU know what restrains him NOW” (v. 6). In addition, “The mystery of lawless is ALREADY at work” (v. 7). He takes his seat in the temple. What temple? The temple that would be destroyed in A.D. 70. There is no reference to a rebuilt temple in 2 Thess. 2.

10. II Peter 3: Peter uses the word ‘YOU’ several times talking to his present day hearers about the coming Day of the Lord, but obviously applicable to hearers of the future, for if not then when did the heavens pass with a great noise and the elements melt with fervent heat (vs. 10)?

Peter does not use YOU in 2 Peter 3:10. This is a general statement that can apply to any audience. He does use YOU in v. 11, and it’s appropriate. Knowing these things are going to happen, “what sort of people ought YOU to be—those receiving his letter—in holy conduct and godliness.” In verse 14 we read: “YOU look for these things.” This is an obvious reference to the future. We’re being told by Peter that his present audience is looking for these things.

11. Zech. 9:9–10: The prophet uses ‘YOU’ obviously not referring to his present day hearers for they did not see the Messiah on the donkey and they certainly did not see His dominion from the River to the ends of the earth.

What’s the audience? In Matthew 24, we are told there is a particular audience—Jesus’ disciples (Mt. 24:1). Zechariah 9:9 is addressed to the “daughter of Zion,” a designation for the NATION of Israel. There is no way you can make the YOU of Matthew 24 to mean a general audience when there is a particular audience right in front of Jesus.

12. The point being that prophetic language is understood in a different light than historical narrative and if you fail to make the distinction then obvious problems arise which cannot be reconciled with the text.

This is a huge mistake on your part. The same rules apply across the board. There are no special “prophecy rules.” You will find in historical narratives the use of symbolic language.

13. The big fault with Reformed eschatology is the failure to apply the same rules of interpretation throughout the Bible.

As you can see, I have applied the same rules throughout. You are the one who wants to fudge on the rules. I have stuck with the details of the text in Matthew 24. I compared Scripture with Scripture.

14. In Gen. 1 the words are literal but in the New Testament all of a sudden the church is now the new Israel, literal curses were fulfilled upon Israel in the OT but the literal promises given to the same people now apply to the church!!

Where have I ever said “the church is now the new Israel”? I have never said any such thing. I believe every promise made to Israel was literally fulfilled. Again, I don’t have time to go into every detail of this claim. I think I’ve given you

enough to think about. I suggest that you read more widely, beginning with my book *Last Days Madness*. I've debated this subject numerous times and have been confronted with every possible question.

15. I do appreciate your ministry's purpose in teaching about the influence of Christianity upon American history and would be interested in updates and emails along those lines.

I appreciate this.

Gary DeMar