

The Texts of Time

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IF SOMETHING HAS WITHSTOOD the test of time, it has lasting value and there is an element of certainty to it. With regard to the predictions of the prophecy pundits, one thing is surely certain: none of them have ever been right. Ever. Their prophecies have not stood the test of time.

From Hal Lindsey to John Hagee, the success of their forecasts isn't even a maybe. To date, all pop-prophecy predictions have a 100% failure rate. There are no exceptions. The experts in the field have no fruit to yield. Perhaps the prophecy experts aren't withstanding the test of time because they're not understanding the texts of time? In other words, they don't have a clue as to the very Bible passages they thought they knew.

The Crumbling Pillars of the Prophecy Thrillers

Craig C. White, the purveyor of the website hightimetoawake.com,¹ is a good example of a prophecy “expert”—whose predictions have been left in the dirt. In his book, *Our Salvation is Nearer!: 4 pillars for understanding near time Bible prophecy*, White informs the reader:

“This book is filled with reports about the prophetic world events that signify the last days of the Church age. These events are happening now. The day of the Resurrection and Rapture of Church age believers in Jesus Christ is rapidly approaching. The countdown to the Rapture shouldn't be measured in years and years but the day of resurrection and the gathering together to meet Jesus Christ in the air should now be expected in months to perhaps a couple of years.”²

That book was written in 2016. It's almost 2024—8 years later. White's book was specifically about “near time” prophecies in the Bible. According to White, the Dispensational air show would be a go within a “couple of years” at most. Time's up, and his predictive skills are toast.

Technically speaking, the word “couple” means *two*.³ This would make White a false prophet by the year 2018. But let's not be too hard on him. According to Dictionary.com, the word is “often used casually to mean much the same thing as a few, which commonly means around two, three, or four.”⁴ So, does this get White off the hook? Let's look: 2016 + 4 (the largest number a “couple” might possibly mean) = 2020. Nope, he's still a false prophet. Luckily for White and his crew, these aren't the times of the Old Testament Jews (Deut 18:20).

Getting in Line with “The Time”

But why should a false prophet care about the meaning of a word like “couple,” or a Bible verse that might get him into trouble? The prophecy pundits seem to have no regard at all for the meaning of words or the context of Scripture. For instance, White’s book opens with this verse:

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation **nearer** than when we believed” (Rom 13:11)

Under the citation of Romans 13:11, White begins the book with these words and calls our attention to the importance of knowing “the time”:

“The apostle Paul assumes that we know the time, or that we understand the season. If we do understand the season then we must stir from our spiritual sleep and become alert. We must be prepared for our salvation. In this verse salvation is not our spiritual rebirth but salvation is our physical resurrection, and gathering together to meet Jesus Christ. In this way we will escape the wrath that is to come upon the earth.”⁵

The problem is that Paul was speaking to people living almost 2000 years ago. White says that “Paul assumes that we know the time,” but “we” are not the people to whom Paul was writing. Having said that, however, it would indeed be helpful if we knew “the time” that Paul had in mind. To do that, we need to pay attention to the *words* that Paul was using.

Words Mean Things

Near is a word, and as the Rush Limbaugh Undeniable Truth of Life dictates: *words mean things*.⁶ With that said, the word *near* means “nigh, close, or at hand.” In other words, the salvation of which Paul spoke was “nigh, close, or at hand” to him and his readers—almost 2000 years ago. Those people died a very long time ago. If that salvation still hasn’t arrived, it wasn’t “near” to the Roman believers in any sense of the word.

And this isn’t the only time-sensitive statement that Paul makes in Romans. In the very next verse, he says, “*The night is almost gone, and **the day is near***” (Rom 13:12). Again, Paul uses the word “near.” Paul uses the same word in Philippians 2:30 when speaking of Epaphroditus who “*nearly died for the work of Christ*.” This doesn’t mean that death was a possibility for him 2000 years in the future. Epaphroditus was “risking his life,” says Paul, and death was an immediate threat—a clear and present danger.

In Romans 16:20, Paul speaks of a clear and present danger to Satan, and he uses another word that means something: “*The God of peace will **soon** crush Satan under your feet*.” This is another text of time. The word soon means “quickly, hastily, speedily, immediately.”⁷ Whatever Paul and the Romans were

anticipating, it was *near* and *soon* to them in their own time. Was Paul right or wrong, and why is it taking so long?

Do the Texts Pass the Inerrancy Test?

Commenting on these passages in Romans, along with Paul's advice for believers to remain single because "the time has been shortened" (1 Cor 7:29), Christopher M. Hays writes:

"... had the Roman Christians known that they would not witness Satan's overthrow before they all died, Paul's promise would have proven a cold comfort ... "In brief, Paul's exhortations in 1 Cor 7:29–31 and Rom 13:11–12, 16:20 invoke and indeed logically depend upon his assumption that Christ will return within the lifetimes of at least some of his contemporaries. But, to be frank, the terminology of soon, quickly, and near seems today to be impossible to reconcile with the fact that two thousand years have elapsed ... 'Soon' it was not."⁸

Hays goes on to point out that "Paul was not the only New Testament author to be premature in promises of the world's end; the book of Revelation seems to have been similarly embarrassed."⁹ Indeed, John used the same words as Paul, i.e., "soon" and "near," when he penned the letters now known as the book of Revelation. John told the seven first-century churches of Asia minor that the events of his prophecy "must soon take place" (Rev 1:1) and that "the time is near" (Rev 1:3). In the spirit of C.S. Lewis,¹⁰ Hays considers this to be *embarrassing* because he thinks John "promises of the world's end" rather than promising Jerusalem's end in AD 70.

When we understand these prophecies in their own context, however, there's no reason for embarrassment. The time texts pass the inerrancy test. Everything came to pass just as Jesus and the Apostles had forecast. But the prophecy pundits need the prophecies to be about our world today; otherwise, they wouldn't even be able to give their books away! There's no money in that, so they run from the facts.

In an effort to keep doomsday up next, they redefine the time texts. With that said, it's time to put their redefinition of time to the linguistic test. Believers should not be embarrassed by their Bible, but they should be embarrassed by the way in which the prophecy experts twist it to their own survival.

Appropriateness of Time vs. Shortness of Time

According to *Revelation Logic—A Commentary on Revelation*,¹¹ "... the primary notion of 'time' conveyed by this word isn't 'elapsed time' (as in relation to a clock or calendar), but rather it is "appropriate time" ... This wording emphasizes the *appropriateness* of the time rather than the shortness of time. The time for these things to happen was appropriate when John wrote Revelation, and it is just as appropriate today."¹²

To untoss this word salad, the author here is attempting to pit *appropriateness* of time over and against *shortness* of time. In other words, the time for these things to happen is always appropriate, but the time wasn't really shortened when the authors of the Bible wrote it.

But Paul himself says, “*the time has been shortened*” (1 Cor 7:29a). As such, he advocates singleness and celibacy (1 Cor 7:25-28). He says, “*those who have wives should be as those who have none*” (1 Cor 7:29b). Not only is it incongruent to contrast the New Testament's nearness of time with appropriateness of time, but one must wonder why the pundits aren't advocating celibacy for believers nowadays. After all, these passages are “just as appropriate today,” according to them. Paul's understanding of *near* seems clear, and if the end is still near today, believers should be living a whole different way.

Temporal Nearness vs. Spatial Nearness

Another attempt to deal with the New Testament nearness of the Lord's coming is to say that the word “near”¹³ is *spatial* in nature rather than *temporal*. In other words, *near* is not really a time word at all. Examples are given, such as Luke 19:11 which says that Jesus was “*near to Jerusalem*,” and John 3:23 which says that John “*was baptizing at Aenon near Salim*.” When applied to the prophetic passages, the argument boils down to the idea that the prophesied events are always “spatially near”—or always imminent and ready to appear.

Supposedly, the end times show is on the slate, but the apocalyptic horsemen can't get their horses out of the gate. They are spatially near the starting line, but temporally lagging behind. This is similar to the explanation before, only it makes your head hurt even more.

Fortunately, responding to this convolution is less difficult than trying to follow it in the first place. Of course, the word can be used in spatial terms, but this doesn't negate the fact that it can also be used in temporal terms. In Mark 13:28, “*summer is near*,” and in John 6:4 “*the Passover was near*.” This is no different than how we use the word “near” today. For example, “I'm near the store to buy presents because Christmas is near.” In this sentence, the first “near” is spatial and the second “near” is temporal. One nuance of the word doesn't exclude the other, and the context determines its connotation in each case. As Ken Gentry writes:

“The various samples of *eggus* in the New Testament all agree: some relating spatial, others temporal nearness (Mt 24:32, 33; 26:18; 13:28, 29; Lk 19:11; 21:30, 31) . . . Perhaps the most interesting proof of the meaning of these terms is the various competing, innovative, counter-intuitive attempts to get around their obvious significance! Indeed, if these terms do not express temporal nearness, what terms could John have used to do so?”¹⁴

It Was the Time to Hear That Was Near

Gentry's characterization of these approaches as "innovative" is fitting, as each new attempt gets increasingly more imaginative than the previous. A particularly inventive way to get around John's use of the word "near" in Revelation 1:3 is the argument that it was not the events of the prophecy itself to which John was referring. Rather, it was the time to read the prophecy and hear its words that was "near." As one writer puts it, "The place in time is now, or here right now to read the words, to hear the message and to keep what is in it. This does not imply 'soon' is the time these events are going to happen . . ." ¹⁵

According to this approach, John is writing to seven first-century churches, and he's telling them to hurry up and read about these things that have nothing whatsoever to do with them or their current situation. So, you have to ask: what would even be the point of reading it in the first place? Why would it be so urgent and so necessary that they immediately know about things that aren't even going to happen for another 2,000 years or more? More to the point, why would they even care?

For most people reading words like "soon" and "near," the meaning is obvious and clear. And the bizarre attempts to explain away what is plain as day are eccentric and strange—almost like a carnival. In fact, one writer goes so far as to say that we should "think of a carnival" when we read the New Testament's time statements!

The Carnival Approach

By far, the most creative approach comes from a writer who concedes that Revelation 1:3 and 22:10 "are like bookends enclosing the whole prophecy of Revelation. The fulfillment of everything, not just a part, is near."¹⁶ While this is certainly true, it puts the screws to his view. "The assertion of nearness," he says, "might seem to be in tension with the arguments in favor of futurism."¹⁷ He considers the problem to be "so vexing that it deserves separate attention."¹⁸ His solution? "Think of a carnival."¹⁹ He writes:

"People using a sledgehammer try to propel a weight up to hit the bell at the top. The rising of the weight is like the rising of . . . persecution and antichrist activity. The weight gets near to the top, that is, near to the Second Coming. It may rise and fall several times before someone finally succeeds in ringing the bell. Likewise, there may be many crises before the end, and each is nearer to the Second Coming."²⁰

While this is clever and ingenious, it's doubtful that John's original readers would have thought of a "carnival" when he told them the time is "near." More to the point, this just isn't how this word is used. When John said that "the Passover was near" (John 2:13), he obviously didn't mean every generation gets nearer and nearer to the Passover as time goes on. He meant that the Passover was right around the corner. In like manner, Christ's coming was right around the corner.

The efforts to evade this by parsing appropriate time with shortened time, temporal nearness with spatial nearness, time to hear versus the events being near, and a carnival goer swinging a sledgehammer, make little sense and amount to nonsense.

The Consequence of the Nonsense

The bottom line is that the time texts mean what they say, and these texts have nothing to do with us today. There is no inevitable tribulation or world dictator on the horizon threatening our future. This is not to say that such threats might not come, but it is to say that those possible horrors would have nothing to do with Bible prophecy. Ironically, they would have everything to do with believers continuing to misunderstand Bible prophecy.

Rather than being the salt and light that God has called us to be in this world and working for cultural change in every area of life, Dispensationalism conditions Christians to think that the cultural decline is an irreversible sign. And the leaders of the movement parade themselves as in touch with the divine.

Case in point: in a recent video, popular prophecy pundit, Pastor Mark Driscoll, pauses in the middle of his sermon and goes into a seemingly trance-induced state. He closes his eyes as if he is suddenly receiving a psychic premonition or a word from the Lord, and then he opens them with a crazed look on his face. With a shout, he declares: “The world looks. I just feel inclined to say this. IT’S GETTING WORSE! HE’S GETTING CLOSER!!”²¹ The audience eats it up. This is what they came for, and Driscoll just keeps giving them more.

And this is why we fail. If “getting worse” = “He’s getting closer,” why work to try and make things better? For the purveyors of pop-prophecy, the “world events” that “are happening now” signify “the last days,” as Craig C. White says in his book. For White, Driscoll, and all those who follow them, bad news is good news!

As White joyfully tells his readers, the “day of the Resurrection and Rapture” is “rapidly approaching” and the “countdown to the Rapture” has begun. As with all the failed and false prophets who’ve gone before, their predictions will fall flat on the floor. In the meantime, time will march on, and future generations will continue to suffer the consequences of our complacency until we get this right. The prophetic soothsayers won’t stand the test of time because they don’t understand the texts of time. †

1. <https://hightimetoawake.com/>
2. White, Craig C. *Our Salvation is Nearer!: 4 pillars for understanding near time Bible prophecy* (High Time to Awake Book 13) . High Time to Awake. Kindle Edition.
3. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/few-vs-couple-vs-several/>
4. Ibid.
5. White, Ibid.
6. <https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2021/04/21/undeniable-truth-of-life-words-mean-things/>
7. The word in the Greek is τάχος (*tachos*).

8. Ibid. Christopher M. Hays, *When the Son of Man Didn't Come: A Constructive Proposal on the Delay of the Parousia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), p. 35.
9. Ibid.
10. <https://merecslewis.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-most-embarrassing-verse-in-bible.html>
11. <https://revelationlogic.com/>
12. <https://revelationlogic.com/articles/what-does-soon-mean/>
13. GK: ἐγγύς (*engus*) and its cognates
14. <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2022/10/18/the-key-key-to-revelation/>
15. Whitsett M.Div. Th.M., Rev. Stephen. *The Cold Case Against Full Preterism: AKA Realized Eschatology* (p. 55). Kindle Edition.
16. <https://frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yTDWFBcHb8> ; 1:03:52 – 1:04:04.