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A CRITIQUE OF THE PRETERIST VIEW OF "SOON" AND "NEAR" IN REVELATION*

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MANY INTRIGUING QUESTIONS surround the background and interpretation of the Book of Revelation. One issue that has drawn renewed interest and investigation is its date of composition. This is a critical factor in establishing the historical setting of the book.[1] A decision about the date of Revelation can dramatically affect one's view of the audience, purpose, and message of the book. Although the date of Revelation has always been an issue, the discussion has been reopened in recent years primarily by preterist interpreters who argue that the book was written in the time of the Roman emperor Nero.

Most scholars hold to one of two main dates for the composition of Revelation—in A.D. 65–66 during Nero's reign or in A.D. 95–96 in Domitian's reign.[2] The Neronic date is strongly championed (and the other is most vehemently criticized) by contemporary

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1 Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1986; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 3.

2 Actually four dates for Revelation have been held throughout church history, and each of these dates is related to an early Roman emperor who reigned in the following years: Claudius (A.D. 41–54), Nero (54–68), Domitian (81–96), and Trajan (98–117). See D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 707–8. A fifth view, held by several modern scholars, dates Revelation in the years immediately following Nero, about A.D. 69. See Mark Wilson, "The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again," *Neotestamentica* 39 (2005): 164. Still another view is held by David Aune, who says that the first edition of Revelation was composed during the reign of Nero while the final edition was completed toward the end of the reign of Domitian, or more likely, he says, during the early part of the reign of Trajan (*Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1998], lviii).

preterists, who view Revelation primarily as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the forty-two months leading up to that destruction.[3]

Contemporary preterists have painted themselves into a narrow corner for the date of Revelation. According to Gentry, Revelation anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem (August, A.D. 70), the death of Nero (June, A.D. 68), and the formal imperial engagement of the Jewish War (spring, A.D. 67). He also maintains that the book was written after the initial outbreak of the Tribulation, which he believes began with the Neronic persecution in November, A.D. 64. Therefore for Gentry and other preterists the *terminus a quo* for Revelation is the beginning of the Neronic persecution in November, A.D. 64, and the *terminus ad quem* is spring, A.D. 67.[4] If Revelation is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (in August, 70) and the forty-two-month Tribulation that preceded it, then it had to be written no later than the spring of A.D. 67. The preterist interpretation therefore depends on a pre-spring 67 date of composition, not just a pre-70 date, as is often implied.

The other view, which has been the dominant one throughout church history, is the Domitianic date (A.D. 95–96).

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[3] Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), 256, 336. The term "preterism" comes from the Latin word *praeter* that means "past." R. C. Sproul defines preterism as "an eschatological viewpoint that places many or all eschatological events in the past, especially during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70" (*The Last Days according to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 228).

There are three types of preterism. The first is a literary-critical or contemporary historical wing of preterism that holds that events in John's time can be identified in the symbols he used. This branch of preterism is often called the "left wing" of preterism and is outside the scope of evangelicalism (Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997], 37).

The second form of preterism, known as partial, orthodox, or moderate preterism, is the most popular form today. Partial preterists believe that most of the prophecies in the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century but that some prophesied events still lie in the future, such as the literal second coming of Christ to the earth, the Resurrection, and future judgment (Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus*, 24, 228).

The third type of preterism is called consistent, radical, or full preterism. Full preterists "assign all these events to the first century" (ibid., 228). For a presentation of full preterism see J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, new ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). The common thread in every form of preterism is that the kingdom of God has already arrived and that "in a real historical sense the parousia has already occurred" (Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus*, 24). According to preterists Christ came in A.D. 70 in a "cloud coming" to bring destruction on the nation of Israel.

[4] Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Beast of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2002), 106, 245.

Much of the recent interest in the preterist view can be attributed to the writing and teaching of Kenneth Gentry,[5] Gary DeMar,[6] R. C. Sproul,[7] and most recently, Hank Hanegraaff, host of *The Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast.[8] Preterist websites and conferences have further fueled the spread of this system of eschatological interpretation. Thus the date when the Book of Revelation was written has become a key issue in the study of that book in particular and biblical eschatology in general.

The preterist dependence on the early date for Revelation is aptly stated by Winters. "When the interpretation depends upon the date, the interpretation can never be more certain than the date itself—if the date is wrong, then, of necessity the interpretation is wrong. The whole business of making the interpretation depend upon the date is therefore built upon a sandy foundation. . . . But if the late date is correct, the whole approach that assigns Revelation as a prophecy fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem is false and must be totally rejected."[9] The entire preterist system therefore rises or falls on the early date of Revelation.

To support an early date for the writing of Revelation, preterists say that John expected his prophecies to be fulfilled in his lifetime.[10] Preterists maintain that the fulfillment of the events prophesied in Revelation and most of the other prophecies in the New Testament were chronologically very near to the time they were written. To substantiate this view they point to three "time texts" in Matthew (10:23; 16:28; 24:34). While all three of these verses are emphasized by preterists, 24:34 is the classic text for their eschatological approach. "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Preterists contend that "all these things," that is, all the things predicted in

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5 Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell.*

6 Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: The Folly of Trying to Predict When Christ Will Return* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991); and idem, *End Times Fiction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

7 Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus.*

8 Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004); and idem, *The Last Sacrifice* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005). These are fictional works, but they were written to teach and popularize the notion that Revelation was written in the mid-60s A.D. and that Nero was the beast of Revelation 13.

9 Howard Winters, *Commentary on Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Carolina Christian, 1989), 15–16.

10 For example Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell,* 133.

24:4–31, were fulfilled in A.D. 70 in the generation that heard the words of Jesus.[11] With this understanding of the Olivet Discourse preterists carry their interpretation forward into Revelation. They believe that John expected his prophecy to be fulfilled soon, that is, within a few years.[12] Support for this position is drawn primarily from three "timing" terms in Revelation: τάχος ("soon"), ἐγγύς ("near"), and μέλλω ("I come").

The noun τάχος and the adverb ταχύ occur eight times in the Apocalypse (1:1; 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6–7, 12, 20). Both refer to "a very brief period of time, with focus on speed of an activity or event, speed, quickness, swiftness, haste."[13] The adverbial unit ἐν τάχει which appears in 1:1 and 22:6 is defined as "soon, in a short time."[14]

Ἐγγύς occurs two times in Revelation (1:3; 22:10) and is usually translated "near" or "at hand." It means "close proximity spatially" or "close in point of time."[15] Μέλλω occurs thirteen times (1:19; 2:10 [twice]; 3:2, 10, 16; 6:11; 8:13; 10:4, 7; 12:4–5; 17:8). Gentry focuses on the occurrences of μέλλω in 1:19 and 3:10.[16] One meaning of μέλλω is "to take place at a future point of time and so to be subsequent to another event."[17] In 1:19 μέλλω means "to be inevitable, be destined."[18] From its field of meaning and usage in Revelation the temporal force of μέλλω seems to be much weaker than τάχος or ἐγγύς.

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[11] For a critique of the preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse see Thomas Ice, "Preterist 'Time Texts,' " in *The End Times Controversy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 83–97; idem, "The Olivet Discourse," in *The End Times Controversy*, 151–200; Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (October–December 2004): 469–90; J. Randall Price, "Historical Problems with a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse," in *The End Times Controversy*, 377–98; idem, "Historical Problems with Preterism's Interpretation of Events in A.D. 70," in *The End Times Controversy*, 355–75; and John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 9–134.

[12] Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 133.

[13] Walter Baur, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 992–93.

[14] Ibid., 993.

[15] Ibid., 271.

[16] Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 141–42.

[17] Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 627.

[18] Ibid., 628.

Gentry argues that the events in Revelation must have been fulfilled within a short time or "soon," that is, a few years after the book was written.

> What historical era best accounts for events of the magnitude expected by John in Revelation? A magnitude that is so covenantally and redemptively significant as to be, in an important and dramatic sense, a "coming" of Christ. . . . Is there an era that could represent such a "coming" and that lies *before* the late date and *after* the early date? If so, then, in light of the clear imminent expectation of Revelation, evangelical scholarship . . . should be compelled to accept an early date on the basis of Revelation's integrity and self-witness.[19]

Gentry answers this question by pointing to the events immediately leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. He concludes that the decade of the A.D. 60s meets the requirements presented in Revelation.[20] "But if the expected events were to occur within a period of from one to five years—as is the case with Revelation if the book were written prior to A.D. 70—then all becomes clear."[21] Thus he says that the temporal expectation of the author seems to demand a preterist approach to Revelation.[22]

There are two problems with this understanding of τάχος and ἐγγύς in Revelation. First, these timing statements are strategically located to frame the entire content of Revelation. Both τάχος and ἐγγύς occur at the very beginning of Revelation and again at the very end, as seen in this table.

Beginning of Revelation	*End of Revelation*
(The Introduction, 1:1–8)	(The Conclusion, 22:6–21)
ἐν τάχει, 1:1	22:6 (ἐν τάχει), 22:7, 12, 20 (τάχυ)
ἐγγύς, 1:3	ἐγγύς, 22:10

These terms are also emphasized by their repetition. They occur a total of seven times in the opening and closing chapters of Revelation. Gentry notes that the temporal expectation of the author is emphasized, "by strategic placement, frequent repetition, and careful variation."[23] In noting the strategic placement and concentration of the timing terms, he states, "Its appearance in both of

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19 Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell,* 142 (italics his).

20 Ibid., 143.

21 Ibid., 141.

22 Ibid., 145.

23 Ibid., 133.

these chapters is significant because these chapters bracket the highly wrought drama of the prophetic body of the book contained in the section from Rev 4:1 through 22:6."[24]

Gentry is correct in this observation; however, he fails to appreciate the implications of the location of these timing terms. With these statements serving as bookends for the entire prophetic content of Revelation, whatever meaning one gives to these terms must be applied to all the events in the book. As Poythress notes, "But 1:3 and 22:10 are like bookends enclosing the whole prophecy of Revelation. The fulfillment of everything, not just a part, is near."[25] Thus the preterist interpretation of these timing terms requires fulfillment in A.D. 70 of the *entire* Apocalypse, including 20:7–22:21. Yet partial preterists, such as Gentry, say this portion of Revelation refers to yet-future eschatological events.[26] This argument of theirs actually works against their view, as Ice notes.

> Revelation 22:6 is passage #6 on DeMar's list of "time indicators" in Revelation: "And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true'; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon (*tachos*) take place." In contrast, Gentry cites Revelation 20:7–9 as a reference to a yet future second coming. This creates a contradiction within Gentry's brand of preterism. Since Revelation 22:6 refers to the whole book of Revelation, it would be impossible to take *tachos* as a reference to A.D. 70 (as Gentry does) and at the same time hold that Revelation 20:7–9 teaches the second coming. Gentry must either adopt a view similar to futurism or shift to the extreme preterist view that understands the entire book of Revelation as past history and thus eliminates any future second coming and resurrection.[27]

Ice is correct in noting that a consistent interpretation of these timing terms demands either a futurist or a full preterist approach to Revelation. And since full or radical preterism denies a literal second coming of Christ and the future bodily resurrection, this view is outside the pale of orthodoxy and is not a legitimate option. Thus one is left with futurism as the only credible, consistent option. In short, the inconsistency of the partial preterist approach to the timing texts undermines the validity of their view.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 34.

[26] Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 254, 276, 418.

[27] Ice, "Preterist 'Time Texts,'" 105.

Gentry does not deal with this argument directly, but he does note that "the New Creation/Jerusalem of Rev 21–22 began in the first century, although it stretches out into eternity in its ultimate consummation."[28] Thus he attempts to establish a soon beginning to the eschatological events in Revelation. But one cannot establish a beginning of all the events in Revelation within a few years of its writing. For instance in what sense did the final release of Satan (20:7–9) and the final judgment (vv. 11–15) begin soon after Revelation was composed? They did not. They are removed from A.D. 95 by almost two thousand years. The failure of this view of the timing texts to account for all the events in Revelation within a chronological nearness renders this view invalid.

Second, the Apocalypse is described as a prophecy in 1:3 and 22:7. Yet, if Revelation was written in A.D. 65–66 and the events in 1:1–20:6 were fulfilled "soon" in the events of A.D. 64–70, as partial preterists maintain, then the bulk of the book was already fulfilled before most Christians ever heard or read its contents. By the time the book was written by John on Patmos and was then copied and carried by the messengers of the seven churches and then recopied and widely disseminated, the prophesied events would have already occurred. The powerful prophetic message of the Apocalypse would have been one great anticlimax. By the time most people heard the message of the book, the "soon" events of A.D. 70 would have already occurred. Revelation would have had one of the shortest shelf-lives of any book in history.

The Words "Soon" and "Near" in Futurism

Therefore the preterist view of the timing terms in Revelation should be rejected. But if this interpretation of the timing texts is invalid, how should they be understood? If one adopts a futurist view of Revelation 4–22, how could events so remotely future be legitimately described as "soon" or "at hand"? Five views of the timing texts are held by those who accept a late (Domitianic) date for the composition of Revelation.[29]

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[28] Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion,* 418–19.

[29] A sixth view that is rarely mentioned is that ἐν τάχει may refer to the certainty of fulfillment of the events in Revelation (Leon Morris, *Revelation,* rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 46). While the notion of certainty may be part of the meaning, this view does not seem to give adequate consideration to the temporal connotation.

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

Caird views the coming crisis in Revelation not as the consummation of history but as the persecution of the church by the Roman Empire; thus he believes the prophecies in the book were fulfilled "soon" in their entirety.[30] The problem with this interpretation is that, as already noted, whatever meaning one gives to the timing statements in Revelation, all the events in the book must occur within that time frame. As noted, the timing statements frame the content of the entire book (1:1, 3; 22:6–7, 10, 12, 20). Caird holds that the events in Revelation 1:1–20:6 were fulfilled "soon" in the persecution of the church. However, he views Revelation 20:7–22:21 as yet future. Caird's failure to deal with all the material in Revelation within a chronological "nearness" is a problem for his view.

BEGINNING OF FULFILLMENT IN JOHN'S DAY

Beale believes that ἐν τάχει in Revelation 1:1 is derived from Daniel 2:28–29, 45, and he calls it, "the definite, imminent time of fulfillment, which likely has already begun in the present."[31] He contends that John understood the Tribulation, the defeat of evil, and the establishment of the kingdom that Daniel expected to occur in the distant future would commence in his own generation.[32] The problem with this view is that for the most part it requires a highly idealized, nonliteral interpretation for the material in Revelation that fails to give any concrete meaning to the referents of the symbols and figures.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

Some maintain that τάχος in Revelation denotes the manner or qualitative nature of Christ's coming, not its timing, and should therefore be translated "quickly" or "suddenly."[33] In other words the events will come "suddenly," "quickly," or without delay once the appointed time arrives, and they will rapidly run their course

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30 G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1966; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 12.

31 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 181–82.

32 Ibid., 182. Beale adopts an eclectic (primarily idealist) approach to Revelation. While he holds that the events in Revelation began in John's generation, he supports the late date of Revelation (ibid., 27).

33 Ice, "Preterist 'Time Texts,'" 102–5; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 35.

once they commence.[34] This understanding of τάχος or ἐν τάχει is within the field of meaning for these terms.[35] However, there are two points that favor assigning a temporal meaning to ἐν τάχει in Revelation 1:1. First, from the lexical standpoint, Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich cite a temporal meaning ("soon, in a short time") for the adverbial unit ἐν τάχει in 1:1 and 22:6.[36]

Second, the temporal meaning of ἐν τάχει in 1:1 is reinforced in the immediate context by the words ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς ("for the time is near") only two verses later (v. 3).[37] Here ἐγγύς denotes "being close in point of time, *near*."[38] Since ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς in verse 3 carries a temporal meaning, it seems more contextually consistent to translate ἐν τάχει in verse 1 temporally as well.[39]

TIME FROM GOD'S VIEWPOINT

A common understanding of the timing statements in Revelation is that the author was presenting time according to God's timetable, not man's.[40] Support for this view is drawn from 2 Peter 3:8. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." Proponents of this view note that God is not limited in His consideration of time the way human beings are.[41] While this

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[34] Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ,* 35. Both Ice and Walvoord interpret ἐν τάχει as primarily indicative of the manner (suddenness or swiftness) of the events in Revelation once they begin (Ice, "Preterist 'Time Texts,'" 102–8; and Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ,* 35–37). However, they both interpret ἐγγύς as primarily indicative of imminency or nearness from the standpoint of prophetic revelation.

[35] Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich state that τάχος can mean, "speed, quickness, swiftness, haste" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 992) and that the adverb τάχυ can mean "without delay, quickly, at once" (ibid., 993). Ice presents further lexical and grammatical support for this interpretation ("Preterist 'Time Texts,'" 102–5).

[36] Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 993.

[37] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 55.

[38] Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 271.

[39] Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 416; and Ben Witherington III, *Revelation,* New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.

[40] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 16.

[41] Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary,* 55–56; and Morris, *Revelation,* 47.

view could be part of John's meaning, it does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation by itself of the terms used in Revelation. It seems doubtful that a reader would naturally make a connection between these timing terms and a passage like 2 Peter 3:8.

IMMINENCY

A fifth view is that the timing terms in Revelation assume the prophetic viewpoint of the author and do not necessarily mean that the events had to occur within a few years of the time Revelation was written. The New Testament authors consistently describe this present age, or the time between the two comings, as the "last days" or "latter days."[42] In 1 John 2:18 the apostle even designated the present age as the "last hour."[43] This means that the "last days" and even the "last hour" have been ongoing for almost two thousand years. The phrase in 1 John 2:18 is especially significant because it originated from the same author as Revelation and provides further insight into the apostle John's prophetic viewpoint.

The phrases "last days" and "last hour" both have an eschatological meaning. Every generation of believers, including the present one, have lived in times in which they sensed an impending and overhanging destiny.[44] These "last days" are always imminent or impending.[45] Since no one knows God's time schedule, the time of fulfillment is always "at hand." These events are near in that they are the next events on God's prophetic calendar. There is a nearness or "at-hand-ness" of the time.[46] As Thomas notes, "The purpose of *en tachei* is to teach the imminence of the events fore-

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[42] G. K. Beale, "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 331.

[43] W. Hall Harris notes that the word "hour" can refer to a period of time, since Jesus used it to refer to the period just before His crucifixion until His ascension to the Father (John 2:4; 12:23, 27; 17:1; "His hour" in 7:30; 8:20; 13:1). Harris points out that the "last hour" in 1 John 2:18 refers to the final stage of history between the two advents of Christ (*1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis* [Dallas: Biblical Studies, 2003], 104–5).

[44] D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 107–8. I. Howard Marshall supports this same idea. He says that John used the words "the last hour" to stress the imminency of the Lord's return and the need to be ready for His coming at any time (*The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 148–51).

[45] Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*, 16.

[46] William R. Newell, *The Book of the Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1935), 362.

told, not to set a time limit in which they must occur."[47] The imminency of these events, emphasized in Revelation from its commencement to its close, calls each generation to an attitude of expectancy and readiness.[48]

The imminent return of Jesus and the need to be ready are expressed by Jesus repeatedly in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:36, 42, 44; 25:10–13). Poythress concludes, "Moreover, neither Old Testament prophecy nor New Testament prophecy is preoccupied with lengths of time measured by the clock. They focus more on the character of the times. Jesus' exhortations to watch (Mark 13:32–37) do not depend on whether the Second Coming is five days away or five millennia away, but on the responsibility of the disciples after he, the master, 'leaves his house.'"[49]

Mounce favors the imminency view of the timing statements in Revelation. "The most satisfying solution is to take the expression 'must soon take place' in a straightforward sense, remembering that in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent. Time as chronological sequence is of secondary concern in prophecy. This perspective is common to the entire NT. Jesus taught that God would vindicate his elect without delay (Luke 18:8), and Paul wrote to the Romans that God would 'soon' crush Satan under their feet (Rom 16:20)."[50] Peter wrote, "The end of all things is near [ἤγγικεν]; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). This too uses the language of imminence to draw the reader into a sense of expectation, motivation, and responsibility.[51]

As Johnson says, "In eschatology and apocalyptic, the future is always viewed as imminent without the necessity of intervening time (cf. Luke 18:8). . . . Therefore, 'soonness' means imminency in eschatological terms. The church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day.

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47 Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary*, 56.

48 J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), 23; and Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*, 237, 241.

49 Poythress, *The Returning King*, 35.

50 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 41; cf. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 55, 59; Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*, 241; and Robert L. Thomas, "Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (1994): 198.

51 Osborne, *Revelation*, 55.

Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day. If this sense is followed, we are neither forced to accept a 'mistaken apocalyptic' view as Schweitzer advocated nor a preterist interpretation."[52] George Ladd also supports this view.

> The problem is raised by the fact that the prophets were little interested in chronology, and the future was always viewed as imminent. Biblical prophecy is not primarily three-dimensional but two; it has height and breadth but is little concerned about depth, i.e., the chronology of future events. There is in biblical prophecy a tension between the immediate and distant future; the distant is viewed through the transparency of the immediate. It is true that the early church lived in expectancy of the return of the Lord, and it is the nature of biblical prophecy to make it possible for every generation to live in expectancy of the end. To relax and say "where is the promise of his coming?" is to become a scoffer of divine truth. The "biblical" attitude is "take heed, for you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:33).[53]

In light of the prophetic viewpoint of the author of Revelation, the nature of the church age as the "last hour," and the imminency of the end times, the timing texts in Revelation provide no support for an early date for the composition of Revelation. Preterists thus have no biblical support for saying that "soon" and "near" mean that the events prophesied in Revelation were fulfilled within a few short years after the book was written.

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52 Johnson, "Revelation," 416–17.

53 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 22.