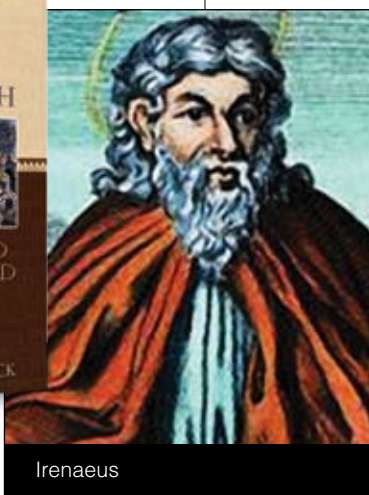
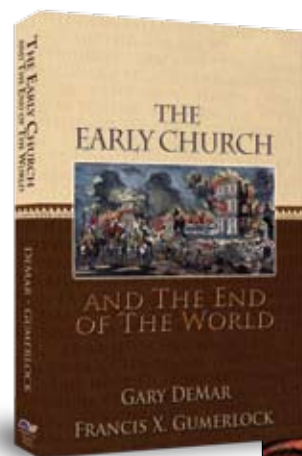


The Date of Revelation: Geisler vs. Geisler

by Gary DeMar

Norman Geisler appears to speak out of both sides of his mouth in regard to when the book of Revelation was written, yet the dispensationalist view is difficult to defend regardless of which dating position is advocated.

IN THE ONGOING DEBATE over Bible prophecy, a number of issues keep coming up. One of the biggest disputes is on when Revelation was written. Was Revelation written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or around A.D. 95? Late-date advocates are almost solely dependent on the ambiguous testimony of Irenaeus (120–202) for their support. I deal with this bit of external evidence in my book *The Early Church and the End of the World*¹ and show that there



Irenaeus

is another way to read Irenaeus' comment.

The late date for Revelation does little to help dispensationalists since there are amillennialists, postmillennialists, and non-dispensational premillennialists who hold to a late date. A late date does not mean dispensationalism is true; the best that can be said is that a late date makes dispensationalism possible. There are early and late date advocates for the historicist and idealist positions on Revelation. In addition, there are a number of prophecy writers who hold to a late date for the composition of Revelation and argue for a preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:1–34).

Geisler vs. Geisler and Turek

Norm Geisler's online review of Hank Hanegraaff's *The Apocalypse Code* deals with several of Hanegraaff's arguments for a pre-A.D. 70 date for the composition of Revelation. One argument that Hanegraaff uses is that Revelation would have referred to the destruction of Jerusalem if it had been written post-A.D. 70. Here's how Geisler argues against Hanegraaff's claim:

As for the *a priori* argument that if John wrote after AD 70 he would have highlighted the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction ([*The Apocalypse Code*] 252), we need only observe that John is not writing a history of this whole period but only of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. So, there was no reason to refer to an event nearly 40 years later. The other Gospels

were written before AD 70. So, they have predictions of Jerusalem's destruction in them.

This is a curious way to argue for a late date since Geisler argues for a pre-A.D. 70 date in *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, a book that Geisler co-authored with Frank Turek. In their chapter on the early testimony about Jesus, they write that "most if not all [of the NT] books were written before A.D. 70."² Consider the following:

Well, here's the problem for those who say the New Testament was written after 70—there's absolutely

no mention of the fulfillment of this predicted tragedy anywhere in the New Testament documents. This means most, if not all, of the documents must have been written prior to 70.³

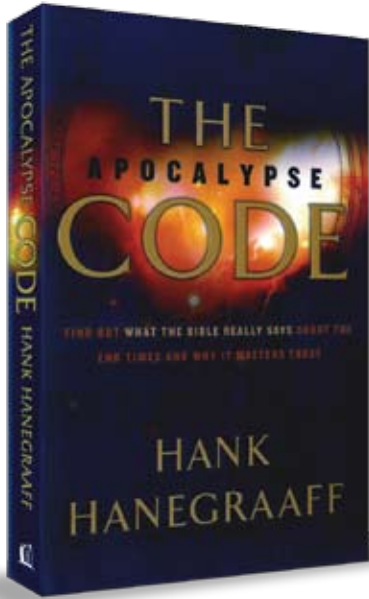
So if we would expect tragedies such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11 to be mentioned in the relevant writings of today, we certainly should expect the events of A.D. 70 to be cited somewhere in the New Testament (especially since the events were predicted by Jesus). But since the New Testament does not mention these events anywhere and suggests that Jerusalem and the temple are still intact, we can conclude reasonably that most, if not all, of the New Testament documents must have been written prior to 70.⁴

Paul Benware, who also holds to a late date for Revelation, describes the above line of reasoning an "argument from silence."⁵ But Geisler and Turek do not see it this way, "for the New Testament documents speak of Jerusalem and the temple, or activities associated with them, as if they were still intact at the time of the writings."⁶ They cite Revelation 11:1–2 to support this claim.⁷ Since, according to Geisler and Turek, all the New Testament books were written prior to A.D. 70, then Revelation 11:1–2 must refer to the pre-A.D. 70 temple and not a future rebuilt great-tribulation temple. But this can't be if Revelation was written around A.D. 95 as Geisler in his critique of *The Apocalypse Code* contends.

Turek vs. Geisler

So which is it? Is Geisler arguing for a pre-A.D. 70 date for Revelation or a post-A.D. 70 date? Since the publication of *The Apocalypse Code*, Turek has abandoned the dispensational view of prophecy and has adopted a preterist paradigm. He writes the following in a review of *The Apocalypse Code* that appears on Amazon:

I have a Doctorate in Apologetics and am the co-author of a couple of apologetics books, including *I Don't*



Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. In my doctrinal program I was taught the dispensational eschatological view popularized in the *Left Behind* series. While I knew that view had its problems—including its treatment of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34—it wasn’t until I read *The Apocalypse Code* did I understand the key to interpreting end-times prophecy. It is this: we cannot understand NT prophecy unless we have the background music of the OT playing in our minds. In other words, the key to interpreting the NT’s prophetic passages is often the OT.

Perhaps the reason I hadn’t realized this sooner is because I never took a real interest in eschatology. I saw

problems with every model, and intelligent arguments on all sides of the debate. Besides, most models believe Christ comes back and we all win in the end, so why argue over the details? It wasn’t until I read Hank’s book did I realize that eschatology is a bit more important that I had imagined.

I suspect that there are more scholars out there who would like to follow Turek’s lead but are fearful they might lose their job because the institution where they teach requires subscription to dispensationalism. Then there is the lucrative Christian publishing business. It’s almost impossible to get a non-dispensational book published. R.C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Baker) and Hanegraaff’s *The Apocalypse Code* (Thomas Nelson) are the exceptions that prove the rule. Sproul was a safe bet because most Reformed people are not dispensational. Baker also knew that Sproul’s well respected reputation and the faithful Ligonier following would mean big book sales. Hanegraaff has a daily radio show where he could push his book.

Of course, Thomas Nelson did publish my book *End Times Fiction* in 2001, a critique of the *Left Behind* series, but I had an inside track. I knew the vice-president, and he wanted to do the book. I told him that a direct attack on *Left Behind* was not attractive to bookstores since they were making a killing on the series. Why should they carry a book that might make them five dollars when they could sell the entire gambit of *Left behind* paraphernalia? *End Times Fiction* had limited sales (around 15,000 before it went out of print about two years ago). Even so, there will

be more dispensational defections in the future as dispensationalists find it more difficult to defend their positions. BWM

WHO OR WHAT WAS SEEN?

John was told, “write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches” (Rev. 1:11). This verse indicates that the original written text of Revelation was sent to each of the seven churches where it might have been copied by a scribe. When the copy was finalized at one church, the original was sent on to the next church until all seven had received and copied the revealed book. Another theory postulates that a messenger circulated the book to the seven churches where it was read by the elders and heard by the congregation (1:3). In either case, what happened to the original? Did it circulate back to John? Since tradition teaches that John was alive during Domitian’s reign, is it possible that John had the original in his possession and what “was seen” was the actual “book” John had been told to write? Anyone who got to see the “book” would know whether the number of the beast was either 666 or 616. The “ancient copies,” therefore, could be compared to the original.

This hypothesis solves two problems. First, the integrity of the time texts is maintained. Shortly means shortly, and near means near (1:1, 3). Second, Irenaeus is not seen contradicting the internal evidence of Revelation which points to a pre-A.D. 70 composition date.

Notes

1. Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American, 2006): www.americanvision.org/store/pc-249-9-early-church-and-the-end-of-the-world.aspx.
2. Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 237.
3. Geisler and Frank, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 238.
4. Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 238–239.
5. Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 167.
6. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 238.
7. Geisler and Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 425, note 20. Benware contends, “Whether or not there was a temple in existence when John received this vision is not relevant and, therefore, Revelation 11 simply has nothing to do with the dating of the book of Revelation.” (*Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 167). So much for a “literal interpretation of

Revelation.” Benware uses Ezekiel’s measuring the temple as a parallel to John measuring the temple in Revelation 11:1–2. Since the temple Ezekiel measured was a future temple, then it’s most likely that the temple in Revelation is a future temple. There is a problem with this line of reasoning. Ezekiel is not the one measuring the temple; it was a man, and the man was not Ezekiel (Ezek. 40:5–6). The accounts are not content parallel.