

ANSWERS AND CLARIFICATIONS FOR GARY DEMAR

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

Gary DeMar is a longtime protagonist against dispensational theology, especially in the area of eschatology or end-time theology. DeMar is an advocate of the following viewpoints: a Reconstructionist, kingdom now, postmillennialist, partial preterist, Israel has no national future, replacement theologian. In other words, someone who is the polar opposite of what I believe the Bible teaches in these areas. Over the years DeMar has brought up various points that he apparently thinks are significant in the area of Bible prophecy since he brings them up repeatedly in articles he has written. Recently he combined a number of them in an article¹ that I will be responding to in this article.

LITERAL INTERPRETATION

DeMar tells of a recent instance when he was talking with an apparent dispensationalist who spoke of his literal interpretation of Bible prophecy. "I bet you that I interpret the Bible more literally than you do," was DeMar's response. I do not know who this person was, but I will say, "I do interpret the Bible more literally than DeMar."

The dictionary defines literal as "belonging to letters." It also says literal interpretation involves an approach "based on the actual words in their ordinary meaning, . . . not going beyond the facts."² The mother of all dictionaries, *The Oxford English Dictionary* says, "Pertaining to the 'letter' (of Scripture); the distinctive epithet of that sense or interpretation (of the text) which is obtained by taking its words in their natural or customary meaning and applying the ordinary rules of grammar; opposed to *mystical, allegorical, etc.*"³

"Literal interpretation of the Bible simply means to explain the original sense of the Bible according to the normal and customary usages of its language."⁴ How is this done? It can only be accomplished through the grammatical (according to the rules of grammar), historical (consistent with the historical setting of the passage), contextual (in accord with its context) method of interpretation.

Literal interpretation looks to the text, the actual words and phrases of a passage. Allegorical or non-literal interpretation imports an idea not found specifically in the text of a passage. Thus, the opposite of *literal* interpretation is *allegorical* interpretation. As Bernard Ramm said in his classic and authoritative book on biblical interpretation, "the 'literal' directly opposes the 'allegorical.'"⁵

It appears that DeMar has an image of himself as a literal interpreter because he believes that his interpretation of "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 is "more literal" than other literal interpretations. Since this is the focal point of his entire eschatology, DeMar thinks he is a more literal interpreter than others even though I believe he does not follow a literal interpretation at many points.

For example, the Greek word "parousia" is used four times in Matthew 24 (verses 3, 27, 37, 39). The leading Greek Lexicon of our day says, *parousia* means "arrival as the first stage in presence, *coming, advent,*" and "of Christ, and nearly always of his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age."⁶ The Lexicon cites all four uses of *parousia* in Matthew 24 as a reference to Christ's second advent. In fact, the Lexicon does not even recognize DeMar's stated meaning of a "non-presence coming" through the Roman Army as a possible category.⁷ The mother of all Greek

word study tools, Kittle's Dictionary, in concert with the Greek Lexicon, tells us that the core idea of the word means "to be present," "denotes esp. active presence," "appearing."⁸ Kittle's describes *parousia* as a technical term "for the 'coming' of Christ in Messianic glory."⁹ Thus, *parousia* carries the idea of a "presence coming," contra the preterist notion of a "non-presence coming," an invisible coming. Our Lord's use of *parousia* demands His physical, bodily presence.

We see another example when DeMar says that there were "false Christs" (Matt. 24:24) leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70.¹⁰ However, there is scholarly consensus that there were not false Christs or Messiahs until around A.D. 130. H. A. W. Meyer explains:

We possess no *historical* record of any false Messiahs having appeared *previous to the destruction of Jerusalem* (Barcochba did not make his appearance till the time of Hadrian); for Simon Magus (Acts viii. 9), Theudas (Acts v. 36), the Egyptian (Acts xxi. 38), Menander, Dositheus, who have been referred to as cases in point (Theophylact, Euthymius Zigabenus, Grotius, Calovinus, Bengel), did not pretend to be the *Messiah*. Comp. Joseph *Antt.* Xx. 5. 1; 8. 6; *Bell.* li. 13. 5.¹¹

THREE QUESTIONS

DeMar poses three questions that I have heard him raise for years. I have answered them in debates, which, of course he will never accept the answers. These questions are:

1. Can you give me one verse that explicitly teaches a pretribulational rapture?
2. Can you point out one verse from the New Testament that teaches that the temple will be rebuilt?
3. Where in Revelation is the seven-year tribulation found?¹²

The answer to the first question is Revelation 3:10: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth." Clearly Christ is speaking to the church since these are letters to the seven churches. The church is promised to be kept out of the time of testing which is said to be the tribulation because it will be a time in which the whole world will be tested. DeMar believes this time-period refers to "the conflagration leading up to the destruction of A.D. 70, the tribulation period."¹³ However, his view presupposes that Revelation was written around A.D. 65, which Mark Hitchcock¹⁴ and most scholars throughout church history have demonstrated is impossible. Since Revelation was most assuredly written in A.D. 95, the question for DeMar is "What does the hour of testing refer to?"

The answer to the second question is the following: Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 11:1–2. Sorry, that was three verses! Since DeMar must presuppose preterism and an early date for Revelation, his explanations of these passages are greatly in error. Since these three New Testament statements speak of a future Temple and they could not have been fulfilled in the first century, then they all three envision a day in the future.

The answer to the third question is found in Revelation 11:2–3 and also in 12:6, 14; 13:5. Even if the length of the seven-year tribulation were not found in Revelation, it would be enough that it is spoken of in Daniel 9:27 and alluded to in Daniel 7:25.

Whether this information is in the Old Testament or the New, we know that the Old is just as inspired as the New. We know from Daniel 9:27 that there will be a final seven-year period to be divided in the middle: “but in the middle of the week.” Thus, a time of three and a half years is established as half of the seven-year period. The Bible speaks of events that will take place during each half. Revelation 11:3 tells us of the two witnesses who will prophesy for 1,260 days, during the first half of the seventieth week of Daniel. While Revelation 11:2, 12:6, 14; 13:5 and Daniel 7:25 speak of the second half of the seventieth week. Since all of the time statements equal three and a half years (1,260 days; times, time, and half a time; forty-two months), one just has to apply simple math to add the two factors of three and a half plus three and a half equals seven. So there you have it, a seven-year tribulation period in the Book of Revelation.

CONCLUSION

DeMar also points out in his article that I believe the references in Ezekiel 39 likely refer to older weapons systems, which is true. He says, “this is a huge concession.”¹⁵ However, DeMar fails to note that in the same article he often cites, I note that I first learned of this view, not from DeMar and the current crop of preterists, but from fellow dispensationalists. In my article, I note that I was first introduced to this view in the 1970s by a pastor named Charles Clough¹⁶, well before DeMar came on the scene. I also quote from a number of dispensationalists who held this view, including Randall Price, Paul Lee Tan, and the late John F. Walvoord. In other words, I learned of this view and was persuaded by dispensationalists who argued that consistent literal interpretation required this conclusion. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary DeMar, “There May Be Hope for Some End-Time Prophecy Theorists,” *American Vision* (April 23, 2012), <http://americanvision.org/5715/there-may-be-hope-for-some-end-time-prophecy-theorists/>.

² *Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged, Second Edition*, (New York: World Press, 1970), p. 1055

³ *The Compact Edition of The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford Press, 1971), s.v., “literal.”

⁴ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Assurance Publishers, 1974), p. 29.

⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd. edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 1970), p. 119.

⁶ Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 782.

⁷ See Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), pp. 123–25.

⁸ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, X vols., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. V, p. 859.

⁹ Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, vol. V, p. 865.

¹⁰ Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), pp. 89-91; *Last Days Madness*, pp. 122-23.

¹¹ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), vol. 2, p. 128.

¹² DeMar, “There May Be Hope.”

¹³ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 229.

¹⁴ Mark Hitchcock, “A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation” (PhD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, December 2005).

¹⁵ DeMar, “There May Be Hope.”

¹⁶ Thomas Ice, “Ezekiel 38 and 39” Part VIII in *Pre-Trib Perspectives* (Vol. VIII, No. 48; August 2007), pp. 6-7.