

IMMINENCE

Key question

Can we expect Christ to return at any time or are there events yet to be fulfilled before He returns?

Key text

II Peter 3:3-4,10

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.’”

Key Definition

Imminence

Imminence refers to the belief that Christ’s second coming for His church could take place at any time. There are no prophetic events that are yet to be fulfilled before Christ comes.

Introduction:

1. Could Christ come at any moment? For many Christians the answer to this questions is “yes.” In some cases, any other answer constitutes a departure from orthodoxy.
2. In these notes we will look at the texts that are used to support an imminent return of Christ.

A. Definition

1. Imminence means that Christ could return at any moment.
2. Imminence means that no prophesied event stands in the way and must be fulfilled before the return of Christ.

B. Arguments used for the imminent return of Christ.

1. **The early Apostles expected Christ to come in their lifetime.**
 - a. **Jn.21:22** “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”

- b. **I Cor.7:29-31** “But this I say, brethren, that time has been shortened, so that from now on both those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.”

2. **The church is commanded to watch for the Lord.**

- a. **Jn.14:3** “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”
- b. **Acts 1:11** “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”
- c. **I Cor.15:51-52** “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”
- d. **Phil. 3:20-21** “For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly **wait for** a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” APEKDEXOMAI “await eagerly”
- e. **Phil.4:5** “Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is **near.**” EGGUS “near”
- f. **Col.3:4** “When Christ, who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”
- g. **I Thess.1:10** “. . . and **to wait** for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” ANAMENO “wait for, expect”
- h. **I Thess.4:16-18** “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”
- i. **I Thess.5:6-9** “. . . so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us **be alert** and sober.” GREGOREO “to be or keep awake”
- j. **I Tim.6:14** “. . . that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- k. **Titus 2:13** “. . . **looking for** the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” PROSDEXOMAI “wait for, expect”
- l. **Jas.5:7-9** “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer **waits** for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and later rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the judge is standing right at the door.” EKDEXOMAI “expect, wait for”
- m. **I Pet.1:13** “Therefore, gird your minds for action, **keep sober** in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” NEPHO “be sober, self-controlled, free from excess”

- n. **II Pet.3:3-4,10** “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’” “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”
 - o. **Rev.3:3** “Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”
 - p. **Rev.22:20** “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly,’ Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.”
3. **“Maranatha!”** A common greeting in the early church which means “The Lord is coming.” I Cor.16:22
 4. The parable of the delinquent slave (non believer) who assumes that his master will not come soon so he is irresponsible. Matt.24:45-51
 5. The parable of the delinquent virgins (false believers) who are not prepared to wait while the Lord tarries. Matt.25:1-13
 6. The parable of the fearful servant who did not invest his talents wisely. Matt.25:14-30

C. **Problems with a doctrine of imminence.**

1. Words used in the NT for an attitude of expectancy toward the coming of Christ are words that do not imply imminence.
 - a. **PROSDXOMAI “wait for, expect”** Paul uses it to describe his waiting for the resurrection of the unjust in Acts 24:15 which is not imminent.
 - b. **EKDEXOMAI “expect, wait for”**
 - c. **APEKDEXOMAI “await eagerly”** Paul uses it to describe the waiting of nature for its deliverance in Rom.8:19 which is not imminent.
 - d. **NEPHO “be sober, self-controlled, free from excess”** Paul uses it to refer to general sobriety in II Tim.4:5 apart from any sense of imminence.
 - e. **GREGOREO “to be or keep awake”** This term is used of general alertness during prayer as in Matt.26:38-41.
 - f. **AGRUPNEO “be or keep oneself awake, be on the alert”** Paul uses it to refer to wakefulness in prayer in Eph.6:18.
 - g. **BLEPO “see, look at”** This is a very general word for sight.
 - h. **ANAMENO “wait for, expect”** This is the only use of this term in the NT but outside the NT it is not associated with imminence.
 - i. **EGGUS “near”** It refers to the end of all things in I Pet.4:7 which is not imminent.
2. There are a number of events that will precede His appearing. Matt.24:1-31
 - a. Many impostors of Christ will come and mislead many.
 - b. There will be word of wars and rumors of wars.
 - c. Famines and earthquakes in various places.

- d. Disciples of Christ will be universally hated and killed.
 - e. Many disciples will fall away and betray one another.
 - f. False prophets will arise and mislead many.
 - g. Most people will be cold and become hatred and lawless.
 - h. The gospel will be preached in the whole world.
 - i. The abomination of desolation (the desecration of the temple) will take place.
 - j. The great seven-year tribulation will occur.
 - k. False prophets will arise and show great signs to mislead.
 - l. The sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its light and stars will fall.
 - m. Angels will sound a great trumpet at Christ's return.
3. The signs will tell us when the event is near (Matt.24:32-36), but if His coming is imminent, then all these events must have already taken place.
 4. Note that "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Vs.34. The key to understanding these words may lie in the scope of "these things" which is defined in vs.33 "even so you too, when you see all these things. Recognize that he is near, right at the door." Many believe that one generation will see all of these signs. The signs will not be spread out over several generations. Another possible understanding of this term can be derived from looking at the way it is used in Matt.23:36 "Truly I say to you. All these things will come upon this generation." In this context the word "generation" probably means "the Jewish people" generally. It refers to an ethnic group not a period of time.
 5. The coming will be unexpected, but only by those who are not of the light. Matt.24:37-44 (I Thess.5:1-11)
 6. In II Thess.2:3-5 suggests that the "Man of Lawlessness" will occupy the Jewish temple before the rapture. If this is true then the doctrine of imminence was invalidated as soon as the dispersion of Israel occurred in 70 A.D.(Ezek. 39:23-29). Israel was not a nation until the Balfour Agreement and her later settlement in 1948. It remains, then, that the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ was invalid for the space of about 1900 years. Israel had to be back in the land in order for the Lord to execute his second coming, as well as other significant preceding events.
 7. The imminent return of Christ presupposes a pre-tribulation rapture. If the pre-trib. rapture is in question then so is imminence.

D. **Conclusion**

1. We are called to be children of light and know the signs that will mark His coming.
2. We are to be alert and responsible as we await His coming.
3. We are to realize that many generations have been too certain that they were the terminal generation.