

4.8 - Imminency

4.8 - Imminency

CONTENTS

- [4.8.1 - The Present Value of Future Events](#)
- [4.8.2 - Certainty versus Uncertainty](#)

[Imminence](#) is “The quality or condition of being about to occur.”¹ In Scripture, the coming of Jesus Christ is portrayed as an imminent event.² This means that Jesus can come *at any moment*: there is no event which must transpire *before* He comes. Imminency makes it impossible to know *when* He might come so the believer must remain constantly on the lookout in case the Lord were to return and find him unprepared (Mat. 24:43; Luke 12:37-39; 1Th. 4:15-17; Rev. 3:3+). Many passages which teach the imminency of events utilize phrases such as “soon,” “quickly,” and “is near.” These events are described from the perspective of God Who “declares the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10). From His perspective, these events are certain but their timing is unspecified. They are “imminent”:

Just as “quickly” is used in Revelation to teach imminence, so also is “near” or “athand” (engu’s) used to mean imminency and thus its usage does not support a first-century fulfillment. Philip E. Hughes rightly says, “*The time is near*, that is to say, the time of fulfillment is imminent. This interval between the comings of Christ is the time of the last days, and the last of these last days is always impending.” . . . It is better to see engu’s as a term that teaches the imminency of a period of time that could begin to happen without the warning of signs.³

4.8.1 - The Present Value of Future Events

These passages convey that the predicted events are *certain* and that they may occur *at any moment* and are intended to evoke in the reader the ongoing expectation that the event is “about to happen” and thereby provide motivation for godly living (2Pe. 3:10-14):

The Impending Advent is the theme which pervades [the book of Revelation] from its commencement to its close. And just in proportion as he who is awake to the great truth of the Saviour’s speedy coming, and is engaged in waiting and preparing himself accordingly, is a better man, and in a safer condition, and really more happy, than the half-Christian and lukewarm;—in that same proportion is he who reads, hears, and keeps the words of this prophecy blessed beyond all other people.⁴

What a check, what an incentive, what a bridle, what a spur, such thoughts as these would be to us! Take this for the guide of your whole life. Act as if Jesus would come during the act in which you are engaged; and if you would not wish to be caught in that act by the Coming of the Lord, let it not be your act.—Charles Spurgeon, “Watching for Christ’s Coming” in *Sermons on the Second Coming of Christ*, 137-138.⁵

4.8.2 - Certainty versus Uncertainty

An [imminent](#) event is characterized by both certainty and uncertainty:

1. The event is *certain* to take place. It is not a matter of “if,” but “when.”
2. The timing of the event is *uncertain*. The event may take place *immediately*, or it may be delayed *indefinitely*.

It is important to differentiate between the words *immediate* and *imminent*. *Immediate* speaks of taking effect without delay, which does not allow for any intervening events. But *imminent* speaks of impending—that is, it may happen at any time. Some other events can intervene, but this does not affect the fact of the return. In the New Testament, the coming of Christ is set forth as imminent rather than immediate.⁶

This tension between certainty and uncertainty leads to several important observations:

A. T. Pierson stated, ‘Imminence is the combination of two conditions, viz.,: certainty and uncertainty. By an imminent event we mean one which is certain to occur at some time, uncertain at what time.’ . . . Since we never know exactly when an imminent event will occur, three things are true. First, we cannot count on a certain amount of time transpiring before the imminent event happens; therefore, we should always be prepared for it to happen at any moment. Second, we cannot legitimately set a date for its happening. As soon as we set a date for an imminent event, we destroy the concept of imminency because we thereby say that a certain amount of time must transpire before that event can happen. A specific date for an event is contrary to the concept that the

event could happen at any moment. Third, we cannot legitimately say that an imminent event will happen soon. . . . an imminent event may take place within a short time, but it does not have to do so in order to be imminent. Thus 'imminent' is not equal to 'soon.'⁷

Events which are seen as imminent can never be said to follow upon some other non-imminent event, for that would establish a precursor to the imminent event thereby destroying its imminency. This is a key factor in favor of the [pretribulational rapture](#) of the Church. For if the Church remains to witness the signing of the 7-year covenant by [Antichrist](#) (Dan. 9:27) or the abomination of desolation (Dan. 12:11; Mat. 24:15) as pre-wrath and post-tribulational rapture positions teach, then the coming of Jesus for His church (1Th. 4:17) is no longer imminent and the Church will begin to watch for Antichrist rather than Christ!

No other prophecy in the Bible remains to be fulfilled before the imminent event occurs. Therefore, if two prophesied events are imminent [the rapture and the beginning of the Day of the Lord], neither can precede the other... If both the rapture of the church and the beginning of the day of the Lord are occurrences that could come at any moment, the timing of the rapture is not open for debate. The only way that both events could be imminent is for them to be simultaneous. If one preceded the other even by a brief moment, the other would not be imminent because of the sign provided by the earlier happening. This fact constitutes strong biblical support for the pretribulational rapture.⁸

The doctrine of imminence forbids the participation of the church in any part of the seventieth week. The multitude of signs given to Israel to stir them to expectancy would then also be for the church, and the church could not be looking for Christ until these signs had been fulfilled. The fact that no signs are given to the church, but she, rather, is commanded to watch for Christ, precludes her participation in the seventieth week.⁹

The writers of Scripture anticipated that many would scoff at the delay in promise of His "soon" coming: "Although Christ's coming is the next event, it may be delayed so long that people begin to question whether He will ever come (cf. Mat. 24:36, 39; 2Pe. 3:3, 4)."¹⁰

Notes

¹ [American Heritage Online Dictionary](#), Ver. 3.0A, 3rd ed (Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

² Mat. 24:42-48; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-40; Rom. 13:12; 1Cor. 7:29; Php. 3:20-21; 4:5; 1Th. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jas. 5:8; 1Pe. 4:7; 1Jn. 2:18; Jude 1:21; Rev. 3:11⁺; Rev. 22:7⁺, 10⁺, 20⁺.

³ Thomas Ice, "[Preterist 'Time Texts'.](#)" in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., [The End Times Controversy](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 106.

⁴ J. A. Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 28.

⁵ Renald E. Showers, [Maranatha, Our Lord Come](#) (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 147.

⁶ Mal Couch, "[The War Over Words.](#)" in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., [The End Times Controversy](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 294.

⁷ Showers, [Maranatha, Our Lord Come](#), 127.

⁸ Robert L. Thomas, "[Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles.](#)" in Richard L. Mayhue, ed., [The Master's Seminary Journal](#), vol. 13 no. 1 (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, Spring 2002), 191,213.

⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 204.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, ed., [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997).