

Imminence

Definition: Imminence is the potential for an event to happen immediately, but not necessarily immediately. There is no certain amount of time before it could happen, therefore no date for it can be set. It is something that could happen soon, but does not have to happen soon. Imminence by its nature is accompanied by the expectation for the event to happen.

In eschatology, it refers to the belief that Jesus could come now, but does not have to come now.

There is nothing that must take place before He comes, though many things could take place before He returns for His Church.

Imminence was the universal hope of the early church according to church history. Even so, the real question is what does the Bible reveal about the expectation of the early church.

Standard texts listed as teaching imminence include the following:

Matthew 24:36 cf. Acts 1:7	Titus 2:12-13
Matthew 24:42-25:13	Hebrews 9:28
Luke 12:36-40	James 5:7-9
Romans 8:19, 23, 25	1 Peter 1:13
1 Corinthians 1:7; 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22	1 John 2:28
Philippians 3:20, 4:5	Jude 21
1 Thessalonians 1:9-10	Revelation 2:16, 25; 3:3, 11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20
2 Thessalonians 3:10-12	

Some of these texts are strong and clear while others only give an inference. Some deal with the issue of expectation of coming and others with the inability to know when He will come. The question that must be asked in examining any of them is what did the writer intend to convey and what would those who first read the text have thought? Some of these are printed below with explanatory comment.

Matthew 24:36 cf. Acts 1:7 is a confusing passage because the immediate context suggests that it is dealing with the return of Christ on the clouds of the sky which will have signs preceding it and that the parable of the fig tree is teaching that we will know the season of Jesus return and when He will be “at the door” but that we will not know the “day or the hour.” At the same time, Jesus specifically told these same disciples in Acts 1:7, in answer to their question whether He was at that time going to restore the kingdom, that it was not for them to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority. So which is it? Perhaps two events are in view? One of which can be known and one that cannot be known.

Matthew 24:42-25:13 The call of the Lord in these passages is that His followers be on the alert - i.e. actively look for His coming (vs. 42). The analogy of the thief (vs. 43) demonstrates His coming would be at an unannounced time and therefore unexpected. Vs. 44 states this directly. The analogy of the slave (vs. 45-51) make the same point using a wicked slave who didn’t think the master would return for a long time. The parable of the virgins (25:1-13) makes the point about those who did not prepare for a delay in the expected time. They went to sleep (complacency) and failed to be alert. Both ends of the time spectrum are covered - those who are caught off guard by a sooner than expected return and those caught off guard because of a later than expected return.

Luke 12:36-40 - similar to Matthew 25. A call to be prepared for an imminent return for “*the Son of Man is coming an hour that you do not expect.*”

Romans 8:19, 23, 25 - Creation and the saints are “waiting eagerly” for the glory that is to be revealed.

1 Corinthians 1:7 *awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,* awaiting eagerly is ἀπεκδεχομένους / apekdechomenous which is the “attitude of a burning expectation”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52; *Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 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.* Paul’s expectation that he (and those with him and the Corinthian believers) could be “changed” at the sound of the trumpet without first “sleeping” - dying.

1 Corinthians 16:22 *If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.* Maranatha is an Aramaic word meaning: *Mar* (Lord), *ana* (our), *tha* (come) - “Our Lord, Come”

Philippians 3:20, “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;*” eagerly wait - (ἀπεκδέχομαι / apekdechomai) an intense yearning for the Lord’s coming

Philippians 4:5 - “*Let your forbearing [spirit] be known to all men. The Lord is near.*” The Lord’s return is used as motivation for Christian conduct

1 Thessalonians 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.*” Wait is ἀναμένειν / anamenein and means to “wait up for” - as in one who waits up for someone to arrive late at night at an unspecified time. They could come at any moment. Otherwise, you could go to bed and just get up about the time they are supposed to come - but you don’t know when they are coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 - “*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.*” Paul includes himself among those who could be raptured.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 - The reason they had stopped working was turning Paul’s teaching of an imminent return into a “soon” return. Paul had to tell them to work and be calm.

Titus 2:12-13 *looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus;* προσδεχόμενοι / prosdechomenoi - looking - has sense of “await” an expectation.

Hebrews 9:28 - *so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without [reference to] sin, to those who eagerly await Him.* (ἀπεκδέχομαι / apekdechomai) - an intense yearning.

James 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 late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing*

right at the door. “at hand” - ἦγγιζω / angiken from ἐγγίζω / ephngiwdzo - 3rd, Singular, perfect active indicative. standing at the door - ἔστηκεν estaken from ἴστημι / histami - Singular, perfect active indicative - This is action that was completed and remains before James wrote the epistle - i.e. Christ drew near before James wrote and continues to be near, and He has been standing right at the door and continues to be there.

1 John 2:28 *And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.* Possibility of John being present (It can be added from John’s comment in John 21:23 that there was a common saying in the early church that John would not die. John did not have that assurance, but acknowledged its possibility.

Revelation 2:16; 3:11 & 22:7, 12, 20 - “I am coming quickly” Expectation of return that could be near. ἔρχομαι ταχύ / erchomai tachu - Futuristic present middle indicative - not “soon,” but “swiftly, all at once” before you could be aware and make preparations.

Revelation 2:25; “Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.” Statement that they could still be present at Jesus’ return.

Revelation 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.

Added to these NT verses can be all the OT verses speaking of the coming of the Day of the Lord Examples:

Isaiah 13:6 *Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.*

Ezekiel 30:3 “*For the day is near, Even the day of the Lord is near; It will be a day of clouds, A time [of doom] for the nations.*”

Joel 1:15 *Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.*

Joel 2:1 *Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the Lord is coming; Surely it is near,*

Joel 3:14 *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.*

Zephaniah 1:7 *Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near,*

Zephaniah 1:14 *Near is the great day of the Lord, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly.*