

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 Christian 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, that is, that they 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) makes 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, both 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, however, 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. Again, note that imminence means that it could be soon, and not that it will be soon. Paul had to tell them to go back 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" - ἤγγικεν / angiken from ἐγγίζω / engidzō - 3rd, Singular, perfect active indicative. standing at the door - ἔστηκεν estaken from ἵστημι / histāmi - 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 tachy is a futuristic present middle indicative. It is 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.*

The Day of the Lord

Examination of the various passages in which deal with the "*Day of the Lord*" show that the phrase is used for several different events. In some passages it is referring to events that will be fulfilled in that time period (near historical). Other passages refer to a time that will occur in the eschaton. Still other passages have a combination of both a near and future fulfillment.

Examples

- *Near historical - Ezekiel 13:5 & 30:3, Amos 5:18-20
- *Eschatological - Isaiah 2:12 & 13:9; Joel 2:31 & 3:14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5
- *Near Historical with Eschatological too: Joel 2:1-11; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7-18

It is important to note that *the Day of the Lord* is also used in both a broad sense of a time period covering years and in a narrow sense of a time period of one particular day. (The length of time of the Hebrew "yom" is defined by context. Cf. Genesis 1:5).

Examples:

- *Broad - Joel 3:9-21; Obadiah 15-21; Zechariah 14
- *Narrow - Joel 2:1-11

It is also important to note that *the Day of the Lord* will encompass both judgement and blessings.

Examples

- *Blessings - Joel 2:31; Joel 3:14
- *Curses / Judgement - Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9; Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7-18
- *Both - Ezekiel 30:3; Obadiah 15; Zechariah 14

The various references to *the Day of the Lord* in the Old Testament vary widely in the particulars of the description of the events of that time.

See attached chart.

Great care must be taken when seeking to coordinate the various passages.

New Testament references to *the Day of the Lord* must take into consideration the Old Testament prophecies.

The Day of the Lord in the broad sense encompasses the whole of Daniel's 70th week while the narrow use of *the Day of the Lord* in some passages may only encompass a specific time within the 70th week.

The Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3
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Conference: Miscellaneous

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

2 Thessalonians 2:3

I believe that there is a strong possibility that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is speaking of the rapture. What do I mean? Some pretribulationists, like myself, think that the Greek noun *apostasia*, usually translated "apostasy," is a reference to the rapture and should be translated "departure." Thus, this passage would be saying that the day of the Lord will not come until the rapture comes before it. If *apostasia* is a reference to a physical departure, then 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is strong evidence for pretribulationism.

The Meaning of *Apostasia* *ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ*

The Greek noun *apostasia* is only used twice in the New Testament. In addition to 2 Thessalonians 2:3, it occurs in Acts 21:21 where, speaking of Paul, it is said, "that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake (*apostasia*) Moses." The word is a Greek compound of *apo* "from" and *istemi* "stand." Thus, it has the core meaning of "away from" or "departure." The Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon defines *apostasia* first as "defection, revolt;" then secondly as "departure, disappearance." [1] Gordon Lewis explains how the verb from which the noun *apostasia* is derived supports the basic meaning of departure in the following:

The verb may mean to remove spatially. There is little reason then to deny that the noun can mean such a spatial removal or departure. Since the noun is used only one other time in the New Testament of apostasy from Moses (Acts 21:21), we can hardly conclude that its Biblical meaning is necessarily determined. The verb is used fifteen times in the New Testament. Of these fifteen, only three have anything to do with a departure from the faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb 3:12). The word is used for departing from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19), from ungodly men (1 Tim. 6:5), from the temple (Luke 2:27), from the body (2 Cor. 12:8), and from persons (Acts 12:10; Luke 4:13). [2]

"It is with full assurance of proper exegetical study and with complete confidence in the original languages," concludes Daniel Davey, "that the word meaning of *apostasia* is defined as departure." [3] Paul Lee Tan adds the following:

What precisely does Paul mean when he says that "the falling away" (2:3) must come before the tribulation? The definite article "the" denotes that this will be a definite event, an event distinct from the appearance of the Man of Sin. The Greek word for "falling away", taken by itself, does not mean religious apostasy or defection. Neither does the word mean "to fall," as the Greeks have another word for that. [*pipto*, I fall; TDI] The best translation of the word is "to depart." The apostle Paul refers here to a definite event which he calls "the departure," and which will occur just before the start of the tribulation. This is the rapture of the church. [4]

So the word has the core meaning of departure and it depends upon the context to determine whether it is used to mean physical departure or an abstract departure such as departure from the faith.

ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ
IS DEPARTURE
(2) MT 19:7
MK 10:4

*How is
the noun
used in
Extra-Biblical
Literature?*

Translation History

The first seven English translations of apostasia all rendered the noun as either "departure" or "departing." They are as follows: Wycliffe Bible (1384); Tyndale Bible (1526); Coverdale Bible (1535); Cranmer Bible (1539); Breeches Bible (1576); Beza Bible (1583); Geneva Bible (1608).[5] This supports the notion that the word truly means "departure." In fact, Jerome's Latin translation known as the Vulgate from around the time of a.d. 400 renders apostasia with the "word discessio, meaning 'departure.' Why was the King James Version the first to depart from the established translation of "departure"?

Theodore Beza, the Swiss reformer was the first to transliterate apostasia and create a new word, rather than translate it as others had done. The translators of the King James Version were the first to introduce the new rendering of apostasia as "falling away." Most English translators have followed the KJV and Beza in departing from translating apostasia as "departure." No good reason was ever given.

The Use of the Article

It is important to note that Paul uses a definite article with the noun apostasia. What does this mean? Davey notes the following:

Since the Greek language does not need an article to make the noun definite, it becomes clear that with the usage of the article reference is being made to something in particular. In II Thessalonians 2:3 the word apostasia is prefaced by the definite article which means that Paul is pointing to a particular type of departure clearly known to the Thessalonian church.[7]

Dr. Lewis provides a likely answer when he notes that the definite article serves to make a word distinct and draw attention to it. In this instance he believes that its purpose is "to denote a previous reference." "The departure Paul previously referred to was 'our being gathered to him'(v. 1) and our being 'caught up' with the Lord and the raptured dead in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:17)," notes Dr. Lewis.[8] The "departure" was something that Paul and his readers clearly had a mutual understanding about. Paul says in verse 5, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?"

The use of the definite article would also support the notion that Paul spoke of a clear, discernable event. A physical departure, like the rapture would fit just such a notion. However, the New Testament teaches that apostasy had already arrived in the first century (cf. Acts 20:27-32; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 3-4, 17-21) and thus, such a process would not denote a clear event as demanded by the language of this passage. Understanding departure as the rapture would satisfy the nuance of this text. E. Schuyler English explains as follows: Again, how would the Thessalonians, or Christians in any century since, be qualified to recognize the apostasy when it should come, assuming, simply for the sake of this inquiry, that the Church might be on earth when it does come? There has been apostasy from God, rebellion against Him, since time began.[9]

Whatever Paul is referring to in his reference to "the departure," was something that both the Thessalonian believers and he had discussed in-depth previously. When we examine Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he never mentions the doctrine of apostasy, however, virtually every chapter in that epistle speaks of the rapture (cf. 1:9-10; 2:19; probably 3:13; 4:13-17; 5:1-11). In these passages, Paul has used a variety of Greek terms to describe the rapture. It should not be surprising that he uses another term to reference the rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Dr. House tells us:

possible,
but not
clear

Remember, the Thessalonians had been led astray by the false teaching (2:2-3) that the Day of the Lord had already come. This was confusing because Paul offered great hope, in the first letter, of a departure to be with Christ and a rescue from god's wrath. Now a letter purporting to be from Paul seems to say that they would first have to go through the Day of the Lord. Paul then clarified his prior teaching by emphasizing that they had no need to worry. They could again be comforted because the departure he had discussed in his first letter, and in his teaching while with them, was still the truth. The departure of Christians to be with Christ, and the subsequent revelation of the lawless one, Paul argues, is proof that the Day of the Lord had not begun as they had thought. This understanding of apostasia makes much more sense than the view that they are to be comforted (v. 2) because a defection from the faith must precede the Day of the Lord. The entire second chapter (as well as 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11) serves to comfort (see vv. 2, 3, 17), supplied by a reassurance of Christ's coming as taught in his first letter.[10]

Departure and The Restrainer

Since pretribulationists believe that the restrainer mentioned in verses 6 and 7 is the Holy Spirit and teaches a pre-trib rapture, then it should not be surprising to see that there is a similar progression of thought in the progression of verse 3. Allan MacRae, president of Faith Theological Seminary in a letter to Schuyler English has said the following concerning this matter:

I wonder if you have noticed the striking parallel between this verse and verses 7-8, a little further down. According to your suggestion verse 3 mentions the departure of the church as coming first, and then tells of the revealing of the man of sin. In verses 7 and 8 we find the identical sequence. Verse 7 tells of the removal of the Church; verse 8 says: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed." Thus close examination of the passage shows an inner unity and coherence, if we take the word apostasia in its general sense of "departure," while a superficial examination would easily lead to an erroneous interpretation as "falling away" because of the proximity of the mention of the man of sin.[11]

Kenneth Wuest, a Greek scholar from Moody Bible Institute added the following contextual support to taking apostasia as a physical departure: But then hee apostasia of which Paul is speaking, precedes the revelation of Antichrist in his true identity, and is to katechon that which holds back his revelation (2:6). The hee apostasia, therefore, cannot be either a general apostasy in Christendom which does precede the coming of Antichrist, nor can it be the particular apostasy which is the result of his activities in making himself the alone object of worship. Furthermore, that which holds back his revelation (vs. 3) is vitally connected with hoo katechoon (vs. 7), He who holds back the same event. The latter is, in my opinion, the Holy Spirit and His activities in the Church. All of which means that I am driven to the inescapable conclusion that the hee apostasia (vs. 3) refers to the Rapture of the Church which precedes the Day of the Lord, and holds back the revelation of the Man of Sin who ushers in the world-aspect of that period.[12]

Conclusion

The fact that apostasia most likely has the meaning of physical departure is a clear support for pretribulationism. If this is true, (Dr. Tim LaHaye and I believe that it is), then it means that a clear prophetic sequence is laid out by Paul early in his Apostolic ministry. Paul teaches in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the rapture will occur first, before the Day of the Lord commences. It is not

until after the beginning of the Day of the Lord that the Antichrist is released, resulting in the events described by him in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians. This is the only interpretation that provides hope for a discomfited people. Maranatha!

Endnotes

[1] Henry George Liddell and Henry Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Revised with a Supplement* [1968] by Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 218.

[2] Gordon R. Lewis, "Biblical Evidence for Pretribulationism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (vol. 125, no. 499; July 1968), p. 218.

[3] Daniel K. Davey, "The 'Apostesia' of II Thessalonians 2:3," Th.M. thesis, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1982, p. 27.

[4] Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Assurance Publishers, 1974), p. 341.

[5] H. Wayne House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?" in Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, eds., *When the Trumpet Sounds: Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), p. 270.

[6] House, "Apostesia", p. 270.

[7] Davey, "Apostesia", p. 47.

[8] Gordon R. Lewis & Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* 3 vols in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), vol. 3, p. 420.

[9] E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1954), p. 70.

[10] House, "Apostesia", pp. 275-