

Time Statements

The significance of God's time statements are established in Ezekiel (written circa. 597 BC):

In 7:1-12 God very clearly told Israel that the time of His judgment against her by means of Babylon had come upon them in that it was "soon" and "near" (586 BC). Then...

In 11:1-4 we're told of some men associated with & including Benaiah who contradicted God's nearness prophecy; so, after God spoke against them, v. 13 tells of Benaiah's death. Then...

In 12:21-28 God condemned Israel for contradicting His time statements or for allowing His time statements to be contradicted, for when He said judgment was at hand, soon, and near, she'd deny it, and God just couldn't tolerate it. (Cf. Rom. 15:4.)

That significance was true for Jesus as well:

In Matthew 24, after the disciples asked Jesus for signs of "the end of the age," He prefaced His list of various events that had to occur before "the end" by warning them that false signs and Christs would appear to cause them to believe that "the end" was nearer than it actually was (Luke 21:8-9). After that...

He went on to list two major events that would inform them that the time was actually at hand: [1] The Gospel would be taken into the world (Mat. 14:14), & [2] the abomination of desolation would occur (v. 15)--when the Roman armies were headed for Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-21). Based on those events Jesus said that then they would know that the end was near, even at their very doors (v. 33). Incidentally...

Those of 2 Tim. 2:17-18 and 2 The. 2:1-3 perfectly fulfill Jesus' predictions; in fact, in 2 The. 2 Paul went on to describe for them some things which must occur as well. [2 Tim. 2 is included because, although it was AD 65, they still said it was earlier than Jesus said it would be.] So...

Although the opposites are found with God in Ezekiel and Jesus in Matthew (viz. deceivers saying things were further off than God indicated and deceivers saying that things were closer than Jesus indicated), the point is demonstrated that God & Jesus feel strongly about our heeding their time statements as well as any other information that aids in pinpointing their fulfillments.

Because we've generally taken all of this seriously, we use such passages as Mat. 3:2, 4:17, and 10:7 against premillennialists in order to show that the kingdom was right around the corner or within their generation at the time of Jesus (not to mention that this timing means it was spiritual in nature).

Time statements concerning Christ's second coming:

Although Second Thessalonians (circa. AD 49) has Paul comforting those brethren by telling them the time for Christ's coming was not going to occur immediately, many years later (circa. AD 61) when he wrote Colossians and Philippians, he mentioned that the Gospel had been taken into the world (Col. 1:23) and that "The Lord is at hand" (Php. 4:5). Then...

About a year later James wrote that "the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord is at hand" (5:8), so much so that He was pictured as standing right at the door (5:9).

About two years after that Paul wrote, "yet a very little while indeed, the coming One will come and will not delay" (Heb. 10:37 in the Diaglott; cf. Young's, various versions, etc.). Then...

About two years after that Peter said that Jesus "is ready to judge the living and the dead" and that "the end of all things is at hand" and that "the time has come for the judgment to begin" (1 Pet. 4:5, 7, & 17). And one more...

Around that same (circa. AD 65) time, John wrote, "Little children, it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18 & cf. 2:28), not long after writing Revelation wherein he penned at least ten statements referring to the fulfillment of Revelation almost immediately:

- 1:1 → things which must shortly take place (NKJV; cf. KJV & ASV)
 - things to come to pass quickly (Young's Lit.)
 - things that must soon take place (NASB & ESV [English Standard])
 - events that will happen soon (NLT)
 - must happen soon (CEV [Contemporary English] & NCV [New Century])
- 1:3 → the time is near (NKJV and most other versions)
 - the time is at hand (KJV & ASV)
 - the time is almost here (CEV)
- 3:11 → I am coming quickly (NKJV, NLT, & NASB)
 - I am coming soon (NIV, ESV, RSV, CEV, & NCV)
- 6:11 → rest a little while longer (NKJV & NASB)
 - rest yet for a little time (ASV)
 - rest a little longer (NLT, ESV, & RSV)
 - [just] wait a short time longer (NCV)
- 10:6 → there should be delay no longer (NKJV & RSV; cf. ASV)
 - there will be no more delay (NIV & ESV)
 - God will wait no longer (NLT)
 - you won't have to wait any longer (CEV)
 - there will be no more waiting (NCV)
- 11:18 → Your wrath has come (NKJV, NIV, & NLT)
 - the time has come (CEV)
- 12:12 → the devil knows that he has a short time (NKJV)
 - he knows he has a little time (NLT)
 - he has only a short time (NASB)
 - he knows that his time is short (NIV, ESV, RSV, CEV)
 - he does not have much time [left] (NCV)
- 14:7 → the hour of His judgment has come (NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, ASV)
 - the time has come when He will sit as judge (NLT)
 - the time has come for God to judge (NCV; cf. 1 Pet. 4:17)
- 22:6 → things which must shortly take place (NKJV; cf. KJV & ASV)
 - things that must soon take place (NIV, ESV, NASB, & RSV)
 - things that must happen soon (NLT & NCV)
 - what must happen right away (CEV)

22:7 → I am coming quickly (NKJV & NASB)

I am coming soon (NLT, NIV, ESV, RSV, CEV, & NCV)

22:10 → the time is at hand (NKJV & ASV) (Cf. 22:10a w/ Dan. 12:4a—500 yrs. vs. 2000+ yrs.)

the time is near (NLT, NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, NCV)

these things will happen soon (CEV)

22:12 → I am coming quickly (NKJV & NASB)

I am coming soon (NLT, NIV, ESV, RSV, CEV, & NCV)

22:20 → I am coming quickly (NKJV, NASB, & ASV) ["Soon" in Mark 9:39 of NKJV.]

I am coming soon (CEV, NCV, NLT, NIV, ESV, & RSV)

* Contrast 22:10a with Daniel 12:4a → 500 years versus 2000 years. Also...

* "I am coming quickly" is present tense, not future; i.e., if "quickly" referred to speed instead of timing, then He would've said, "I will come quickly."

If the clause "these things must shortly take place" means that "these things must shortly BEGIN to take place" (as some affirm), then why all the various imminent statements throughout the entire book? As chapters 2 and 3 indicate, weren't those to whom this was read suffering Christians who were meant to take comfort in Jesus' statement (at least four times) that He was "coming soon"? And how would the *reader* have been blessed (1:3) if the time was thousands of years away?

Besides all these imminency statements, one can see that...

1. The horrible Jewish persecution of the 60s was referred to (2:9-10 & 3:9-10).
2. The tribes of Israel weren't destroyed yet (cf. Rev. 6:16-17 w/ Luke 23:28-30 & cf. Rev. 16:15 w/ Mat. 24:43-46).
3. The Temple was still standing (Rev. 11:1-2). This wasn't the church because it was in the city that *would be* (future) trampled by the Gentiles (v. 2), the city in which Jesus was crucified (v. 8); i.e., Revelation isn't about Papal Rome.
4. The sixth Roman king, Nero, was still alive & reigning at the time (Rev. 17:10). [1] Julius, [2] Augustus, [3] Tiberius, [4] Caligula, [5], Claudius, [6] NERO, & [7] Galba. Nero was in power AD 54--68, so Revelation must be placed within those years (cf. Daniel's prophecies of the kingdom being set up during Roman kings). And Galba did indeed reign for a short time—only 7 months. So...

The point is that not only did the apostles know when the end was NOT near, but they also knew when it actually WAS near.

Here are a few more passages to consider:

In 1 Tim. 6:14 Paul told Timothy to "keep the commandments without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." If Paul didn't believe the Lord's coming was soon, at hand, etc., then why didn't he tell Timothy to be sure to keep the commandments until he died? Wouldn't there be a much bigger chance of his dying than of the Lord coming? Why did he make it sound as though he believed young Timothy would still be around when the Lord came? (Cf. Jesus' exhortation in Rev. 2:25: "Hold fast until death?" Nope. Cf. also 1 Cor. 1:7-8.)

In Titus 2:13 Paul told Titus to be "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Doesn't this also sound as if Paul believed young Titus would likewise be around when the Lord came? (Cf. also Heb. 10:25 & Jam. 5:7 in this regard.)

Speaking of the time subsequent to the judgment, Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on." What? Yeah.

Here's a problem to grapple with:

If the apostles condemned people within the first 25-30 years after Jesus' resurrection for making folks think that Christ's coming in judgment was right around the next corner when it was actually 10-15 years later, then wouldn't the apostles be condemning themselves for speaking in the early 60s about how near it was if it really wasn't near for 2,000+ years? See...

If Jesus wasn't talking to His first century apostles about their age-group, then wouldn't they, in effect, have been the very deceivers Jesus warned about in Matthew 24 & Luke 21? Doesn't it seem that Jesus, in Luke 21:8-9, was condemning those who would claim "the end" had come, or was near, or was at hand, when in reality it wasn't?

If, as I've heard, the disciples didn't have any more or any better information about when the time of Christ's coming really was around the corner, then this all the more makes me wonder why they weren't also to be rejected when they, in the 60s, were saying what others were saying in the 30s & 40s. And...

Along the lines of how all this seems to make the apostles appear deceitful, if they (and Jesus, for that matter) knew that Christ's coming wasn't going to be for 2,000+ years, then why warn people to be ready for His coming instead of just being ready for their deaths, for however we die is how we'll be judged? Was it because that most of that generation would indeed still be around when He came? Seems so.

Here's another problem to grapple with concerning the Greek term "mello":

Let me share with you what a couple scholars say this word means: Vine says the term means "to be about (to do something) ... the certainty of what is about to take place," and Thayer says it means "to be about to do anything; on the point [or verge] of."

And here are some places where this term is found and how those verses are translated in Young's Literal Translation:

Mat. 16:27-28: The Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His messengers, and then He will reward each according to his work. Verily I say to you, there are certain ones standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His reign.

Acts 17:31: He has set a day in which He is about to judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He did ordain, having given assurance to all, having raised Him from the dead.

Acts 24:15: Having hope toward God, which they themselves also wait for, that there is about to be a rising again of the dead.

Acts 24:25: Paul, reasoning concerning righteousness, and the judgment that is about to be, Felix, having become afraid, answered, "For the present, be going, and having got time, I will call for you."

2 Tim. 4:1: I fully testify then by the Lord Jesus Christ who is about to judge the living and the dead at His manifestation and His reign.

Heb. 1:14: Are they not all spirits of service for ministration, being sent forth because of those about to inherit salvation?

1 Pet. 5:1: Elders who are among you, I exhort, who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of the Christ and the glory about to be revealed, a partaker.

Here are a few other "time passages" to consider. (As we read these first three, it helps to remember that Matthew wrote his Gospel account to Jews, using "many" of their prophecies in order to prove that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah-King, as well as what Paul wrote in 1 The. 5:20-21: "Do not lightly esteem prophecies, but prove all things, [and] hold fast [that which is] right" [Darby's].)

In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus said to His Jewish audience, "Don't think that I have come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to destroy them but to bring about what they said. I tell you the truth, nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. Not even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will be lost until everything has happened" (NCV).

In Matthew 13:40 Jesus said to His disciples that His return in judgment would be "at the end of this [*toutou*] age," and we all agree Jesus lived in the Old Covenant age.

In Matthew 10:22-23 Jesus said to His disciples, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end [not until he dies, but "to the end"] will be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

In Matthew 16:27-28 Jesus said to His disciples, "The Son of Man will [*mello*] come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly (or In fact) I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

In Matthew 26:64 Jesus said, "Soon you will see the Son of Man ... coming on the clouds of heaven" (Contemp. Eng. Ver., which must not be too far off in translation since Thayer says the Greek term *arti* means "properly marking time closely connected to the present.") In Luke 22:69 a slightly different term is found which carries with it the idea that, based on what's occurring right now, from this point on, "the Son of Man will [soon, cf. NLT] sit on the right hand of the power of God"; i.e., from the time of His death/resurrection/ascension until He returned (all which would occur "soon"), Jesus would be putting His enemies down (cf. Ps. 110:1, et. al.). Also significant is that Jesus used the plural form of "you," indicating that He was referring to the lifetime of the Sanhedrin members, regardless if Caiaphas himself was still alive in AD 70.

And another interesting passage in John 21 strongly indicates that Jesus would return between the time of Peter's death and John's death. After Jesus told Peter about his future martyrdom, Peter asked Him, "Well what about John?" to which Jesus said in verse 22, "If I want him to remain until I come, what's that to you?" (NASB, cf. NLT). In other words, Jesus didn't think it humanly impossible for John to still be around when He returned; and, since the disciples began a rumor that John would be alive when Jesus came, then they must have expected Jesus to come back in John's lifetime as well. Again...

Let's don't forget how it seems very inconsistent to use Mat. 3:2, 4:17, & 10:7 against the premils, only to reject the same and even stronger language when it comes to Jesus-coming passages, passages that even link His coming with the coming of His kingdom (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1, "who is about to judge" and 1 The. 5:23, "body preserved blameless until His coming").

All of these biblical time-statements are important due to the logical rule of interpreting the more obscure (viz. the nature of Christ's coming) with more clear (viz. these time-declarations). Obviously, if all the above actually means what it clearly appears to mean, then we must re-evaluate our previous beliefs concerning the nature of Christ's coming.

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[Note to Self: Consider adding Jude 14 & context. Did Jude lie?]