

# What About 2 Peter 3:9 – One Day is With the Lord as a Thousand Years?

## CAN GOD TELL TIME?

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One of the most common objections lodged against Covenant Eschatology is this: “Since Peter’s statement ‘a day with the Lord is as a thousand years’ is in reference to the timing of Christ’s return, we should not expect Second Coming time statements such as ‘near, at hand,’ or ‘shortly’ to be interpreted by man’s understanding, but by God’s. Thus, from His perspective, only two days have passed since the NT claimed that the return of Christ was ‘at hand.’”

Historically, [2 Peter 3:8-9](#) have been the basis for a great deal of speculation on the end times. The text has been distorted badly. In October, 2010 Harold Camping of California— he of multiple failed predictions of the end— set (another) date for the rapture of May 21, 2011, based on his claim that “one day with the Lord is a thousand years” (note that he distorts Peter’s words. Peter said a thousand years is AS a day” not “a thousand years is a day.” I sent a debate challenge to Camping, but it was ignored.



Without doubt, though, 2 Peter 3 is the most common objection offered to mitigate the multitudinous N. T. statements that Christ’s coming was to occur in the first century. Based on Peter’s statement, all futurists claim that prophetic times statements are supposedly “elastic,” “ambiguous” and “relative.” However, an appeal to 2 Peter 3, in an attempt to mitigate the time statements of the nearness of the end is misguided and false. Let me make several observations.

We do not have the space to consider all that might be said in response to this objection. However, I have addressed the objection in-depth in my [Can God Tell Time?](#), as well as in my [Who Is This Babylon?](#) The Babylon book has one of the most extensive discussions of the time statements of scripture to be found anywhere. Also, in my book on 1 Thessalonians 4, ([We Shall Meet Him In The Air, The Wedding of the King of kings](#)), I have an even more extensive, and additional, discussion of the time statements. My books are available from [this website](#). Now, to an examination of the objection.

- ☛ The objection is a tacit admission that the words of the N. T., taken at face value, do indicate imminence. We have a right therefore to ask, if God had wanted to indicate that the parousia truly was near, what other words could He have used, other than, “Behold, I come quickly”?
- ☛ It is because of a presuppositional concept of the nature of the parousia that an attempt is made to negate the “when” of the parousia. In other words, the objectors believe in a visible, bodily coming of Christ on cumulus clouds. The N. T. writers said Christ’s coming was near. That literal, physical, material event did not occur within a “soon” time span, therefore, “at hand” cannot mean soon! This presuppositional approach is invalid.

☞ The words “at hand” “quickly” etc., are not the only terms of imminence that are used, and the other language cannot be turned into theological silly putty. For instance, Paul said, “the end of the ages has come upon us” ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)). Peter said, “the (appointed) time has come for (the) judgment to begin.” ([1 Peter 4:17](#)). John said, “It is the last hour” ([1 John 2:18](#)). These statements are of a different nature from “at hand.” They are expressions of a then present reality, not ambiguity.

☞ Did you know that the Bible gives examples of “prophets” making false time statements, and God condemning them for it? He actually killed one prophet for making a false time prediction ([Jeremiah 27-28](#))! Doesn’t that indicate that God can tell time pretty well, and that He expects man to honor His time statements? (See especially [Ezekiel 7:12](#) also, where God said the judgment on Jerusalem was at hand, nigh, and coming soon. The false prophets said it was far off. God condemned them and said that when He said something was near, it would occur in that generation! God can not only tell time, He communicated truthfully about time.)

Peter’s second epistle was written to refute the scoffers ([2 Peter 1:16f](#)).

Peter says that in the second epistle, he was reminding his readers of what the Old Covenant prophets said, of what Jesus and the other apostles said, and, of what he had written in his first epistle ([2 Peter 3:1-2](#)). Consider then the following:

The Old Covenant prophets said that when the last days arrived, the Day of the Lord would be near ([Joel 3:1-14](#); [Isaiah 60:22](#)). Peter said he was living in the predicted last days ([1 Peter 1:20](#)), and the end had drawn near.

Jesus said that his coming in judgment would be in the first century “there are some standing here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” ([Matthew 16:27-28](#)). (See my book *Can You Believe Jesus Said This?* for an in-depth analysis of [Matthew 16:27-28](#)) He likewise said it would, without fail, be in his generation ([Matthew 24:34](#)). There is no way to turn “some standing here” and “this generation” into a timeless, elastic, ambiguousness.

In his first epistle, Peter affirmed that Christ was “ready” (from *hetoimos*, a strong word of imminence) to judge the living and the dead” ([1 Peter 4:5](#)). He said “the end of all things has drawn near” ([1 Peter 4:7](#)), and, again, “the time has come the judgment to begin” ([1 Peter 4:17](#)). Furthermore, Peter said that the Old Prophets were told that fulfillment was not near in their day, but, was near in his day ([1 Peter 1:10f](#)). The attempt to make time language elastic nullifies this temporal contrast between the Old Prophets and Peter’s day. Peter is emphatic that the Old Covenant prophets spoke of his “these days” ([Acts 3:24f](#)).

Notice now: Peter said, “the end of all things has drawn near” ([1 Peter 4:7](#)). The scoffers said “all things continue as they were” ([2 Peter 3:4](#)). The scoffers were denying what Peter affirmed! Are we to suppose that the point of [2 Peter 3](#) was for Peter to say, “I know that I have said the end has drawn near, but, you have to understand that I did not mean that! After all, time statements don’t mean anything!” The offered objection to the time statements actually makes the scoffers out to be the ones who had it right!

Also, if the preaching of the nearness of the end by Jesus’ disciples included the (supposed) fact that “at hand” did not mean soon, *then the scoffers were making an empty objection*. They clearly thought that the language meant something! Only if the message of the nearness of the

end was being taken seriously of a limited time for fulfillment could that objection have any merit.

How would Peter's (supposed) appeal to the meaninglessness of language refute the scoffers? In other words, if Peter was affirming that in reality the parousia might be delayed indefinitely, then as Leithart suggests: "Indefinite delay of the Parousia would be a feeble response to false teachers who are teaching that the Parousia will be delayed indefinitely!" (Peter Leithart, *The Promise of His Coming*, (Moscow, ID, Canon Press, 2004), 67). Was Peter actually telling his audience that the scoffers were right, and that his own predictions of the nearness of the end meant nothing, that the parousia might, after all, be delayed for thousands of years? Consider 2 Peter 3 in light of the Olivet Discourse. In [Matthew 24:32](#) after giving a list of the signs of the end, Jesus told his apostles, "When you see all of these things know that it (his parousia and kingdom) is nigh, even at the door." So, the appearance of the signs would indicate the nearness of the end. But, what did Jesus mean by "nigh" and, "at the door"?

Compare Jesus' words with James' declaration "the judge is standing right at the door" immediately after declaring "the parousia has drawn near" ([James 5:8-9](#)). James' words are a direct echo of Jesus' Discourse. Was James guilty of making premature declarations of the nearness of the end?

If time statements mean nothing, then the signs would mean nothing! How could they know, "it is near, even at the door," via the appearance of signs, if near means nothing! Now watch.

In [Luke 21:8](#), Jesus warned those same apostles, "Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he' and, 'the end has drawn near.' Do not go after them." Please catch the power of what Jesus said!

- ◆ Jesus said the appearance of the signs would prove that the end was near.
- ◆ Jesus said not to believe— and thus, not to make, premature declarations of the nearness of the end.
- ◆ Peter was one of the disciples present who heard Jesus' warnings.
- ◆ Peter said "the end of all things has drawn near"! (John likewise affirmed the nearness of the end ([1 John 2:18](#))!

Those who offer the objection above have a severe problem in light of Luke 21. Did Peter see the signs of the end or not? Well, one of the signs was the completion of the world mission, and Paul most assuredly affirmed the fulfillment of that "sign" ([Colossians 1:5f; 23](#)). (See my [Into All the World, Then Comes The End](#), for an in-depth demonstration of the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the first century).

Peter used almost the precise words that Jesus said the false prophets would use! Was Peter's declaration of the nearness of the end premature? If so, then Peter became one of the very false prophets that Jesus had warned him about!

What happens so often is that on the one hand we are told that the apostolic time statements don't really mean "at hand." On the other hand, we are told that the signs- that those apostles and Jesus spoke of – are present today, and that the signs do mean the end is actually now "at hand." Time statements mean something now, but not from the pen of the inspired apostles! This is a severe problem for those offering the objection from 2 Peter 3.

Now, if the objection under consideration is valid, Jesus could not have warned against premature declarations of the nearness of the end, because time statements were not to be believed anyway! In other words, if it was understood that time statements of the end meant nothing, why would Jesus warn against anyone making time statements about the end? Let them say what they wanted! The problem of course, is that Jesus did condemn false predictions of the nearness of the end!

John said to test the spirits ([1 John 4:1f](#)), whether they be of God. But, if time statements do not mean anything, then there could be no testing of the prophets, for their time statements would not be subject to testing.

History provides *prima facie* proof of false prophets and their premature declarations of the nearness of the end. Edgar Whisenant said the end would be in 1988, and, that failing, 1989. Hal Lindsay said the rapture and end would be in 1988. Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, are all on record as saying that the restoration of Israel in 1948 is the singular greatest sign of the end, and that the generation to see the signs must be the generation of the end. I watched Grant Jeffrey on TBN, (1-14-09), say that ours is the generation that will witness the coming of the Lord, based on the restoration of Israel in 1948. Of course, from 1948 to the present is stretching "this generation" to its limit, and these men join the ranks of those guilty of making false predictions. As noted just above, [Harold Camping](#) has said that there is now "infallible proof" that the rapture and final judgment will be May 21, 2011. His website (accessed 10-21-10) claims the date is "absolute truth."

You see, if time statements of the end mean nothing objective, then Jesus' warnings to reject premature false predictions concerning the end are empty words. They mean nothing.

But of course, Jesus's words do mean something. They mean that only his personal disciples were the ones best qualified (inspired) to make objective true statements about the nearness of the end. Since Jesus told his apostles to reject premature declarations of the end, that means that those making such predictions prior to the apostles were, by the very nature of the case, false.

This likewise means that anyone centuries after the apostles, making predictions of the end, would (are!) false, since Jesus said they would see the signs, and they would know when the end was truly near. Thus, they would truly declare the nearness of the end. And of course, this is precisely what happened!

Paul condemned Hymenaeus for making statements that the end had come— in fulfillment of Jesus' prediction in [Matthew 24:26](#). And, as already seen, Peter said the end had drawn near. James said the judge was right at the door. Paul said the end of the ages had arrived. John said it was the last hour, and, the Father revealed to him that Christ's parousia was coming quickly ([Revelation 22](#)).

The bottom line is that when Peter made his statement in 2 Peter 3, he was not saying that the scoffers were right, and that the parousia had been delayed indefinitely. He was not discounting his own statements of the nearness of the end! He was affirming the faithfulness of God, to keep His promises. The passing of time, whether a long time, or short, did not cause Him to fail. It meant that if He said something was near, it was near. If He said something was not near, it was not near. Peter was affirming that the passing of time did not prevent God from keeping His promises on time!

Incidentally, it seems not to have dawned on those offering the objection to ask: If “at hand” can (virtually must) mean a long time, then what does “not at hand” mean when God said something was not near? There are many examples (See my Can God Tell Time?), in which God said something was not near! Does this mean that He actually meant it was near? Do we really want to turn language on its head by this approach to 2 Peter 3?

Finally, I have a more in-depth discussion of 2 Peter 3:9 in my book [The Elements Shall Melt With Fervent Heat](#). I note that Peter was reminding his audience of God’s faithfulness to keep His Old Testament promises to Israel. This is why he quotes from Psalms 90 in the first place. I have yet to encounter anyone who offered the objection above who had considered this crucial fact.