

# Can God Tell Time?

[Don K. Preston](#)

**A**lmost two thousand years ago John the Baptizer said **"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"** Matthew 3:2. Jesus, Son of God, echoed those words "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Matthew 4:17). The Prince of Peace sent his disciples out to preach the same message, Luke 10. Jesus clearly said the kingdom, and other events as we shall see below, were at hand.

A common response to these Biblical statements of the imminence of the kingdom in the first century is this: "Well, yes, the Bible said the kingdom was coming soon, but remember, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day.' God doesn't see time as man does; He is above time."

Is there anything wrong with these statements? Well, if God cannot tell time there isn't! But if God can read a calendar, and if God truly meant to communicate with man there is something drastically wrong! Essentially, what these statements say is that while God said the kingdom was "at hand," God cannot tell time, therefore the "at hand" time statements mean nothing at all!

This little article is about several things. It is about the inspiration of the scriptures; it is about the faithfulness of God; it is about God's ability to communicate with mankind; it is about the kingdom of the Lord and other prophecy; it is about changing our preconceived ideas to bring them into harmony with God's word.

## Inspiration

The Bible says it is inspired, II Timothy 3:16. The original word translated "inspired" literally means "God breathed." The thought of the Bible being from God suggests that since God is perfect or infallible, if the Bible is from Him it ought to be infallible as well. Specifically, if the Bible made a promise that something would happen within a specified time frame, if that event did not happen when and as promised the Bible's claim to inspiration falls.

Note: There ARE conditional promises in the Bible. In other words God said "If you will do this, I will do this." When and if man failed to keep his part of the bargain God was no longer bound to fulfill his promise. This does not prove a failed prophecy; it demonstrates just the opposite. He was keeping the negative provisions of the prophecy, see Jeremiah 18:1-6.

The promises we are studying in this article were not conditional promises! As a matter of fact, premillennialists very often insist that the promises of the kingdom were not conditional. We agree!

The amillennialist observes that God promised to establish the kingdom in the days of the Roman Empire, Daniel 2. The premillennialist says that was not done. The amillennialist points out that if this is true then one part of God's promise failed. This is a valid and true statement.

If God does not keep the WHEN part of his promises, he has not kept his promise! The inspiration of the scriptures demands complete fulfillment of every aspect of God's promises. So-called prophets of today like to point to some of their predictions that seemed to come true, at least partially. To them, if any part of their prediction came true they claim victory! This is not the Bible standard of determining the validity of a prophet! Partial fulfillment means complete failure! It is Jehovah himself that gave the criteria for determining whether a prophet was true or false; if a prophet's prediction did not come true he was a false prophet, Deuteronomy 18:15ff.

## God's Words-Vs-Man's Words

It seems to have escaped the notice of many that the Bible was written in the common languages of their respective authors. The Old Covenant was not written in some mystical form of Hebrew. It was written in the language spoken in the homes, in the markets, in the fields and work places of the Jewish people.

We are NOT suggesting much of this language was not figurative, and apocalyptic. On the contrary, much of the prophetic literature is just that. What we are saying however, is that even figurative portions of scripture used types of language the people knew. The Jews of old were familiar with apocalyptic language. They studied it every Sabbath. We today need to be far more familiar with this apocalyptic form of language and stop thinking so literally when we read about the passing of "heaven and earth," see Isaiah 34 for instance. In regard to time however we need to see that while much language was figurative, it is unusual for time words to be so used.

The New Covenant is the same. The New Testament Greek is known as the "koine," meaning "common," Greek of the day. The New Testament Greek, just as the Old Covenant Hebrew, was the language of fisherman, carpenters, tent-makers, husbands and wives. What is our point?

Our point is that the Bible is not a book that used words normally meaning at hand to mean a long time! When God said something was NOT near, it really was not near! We shall fully demonstrate this below; but the very nature of the languages of the Bible should make one very cautious before insisting God cannot tell time!

## God, Time, and Communication

Are we saying God is not above time? Are we saying God is bound to time like man? As a matter of fact, in one way, *He is*, more on that momentarily. For the moment however, it is important to know that we are saying Biblical time statements are not a special code language, nor are they any kind of special undecipherable "God speak" language beyond the pale of human understanding. The time statements of the Bible were written and spoken in the everyday language of everyday people, and must be understood within the framework of human understanding.

God's years are endless, "**from everlasting to everlasting thou art God**" (Psalms 90:2). Isaiah calls Jehovah "**the Father of eternity**" (9:6-9). But, the fact that God is above time *in His dimension*, is irrelevant to this discussion.

Here is what we are saying:

**First** ➔ God Himself created time (Genesis 1:14f). Thus, it is *prima facie* evident that God understands time.

**Second** ➔ When communicating with man about events to happen in man's time bound world, God either *could*, or *could not*, or He *would not*, and as a result *did not* communicate honestly and objectively in regard to time words.

**Third** ➔ If God *could not* communicate in understandable ways to man, then His Deity is called into question. What kind of a God could not communicate properly? Are we supposed to believe that God could create the universe, create time, and then *was/is* incapable of speaking properly about events within His created order?

**Fourth** ➔ If God *would not* communicate in understandable ways to man, then His motives have to be questioned. Why would a God, whom scriptures say "cannot lie" (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2), purposely give man the wrong, or false impression in regard to when events were to take place?

**Fifth** ➔ We are saying that because of the above facts, God is bound by His very nature, i.e. *impossible to lie*, to speak the truth in regard to *when* events were to occur. In other words, if He said something was near, because He cannot lie, it was near. And, because He cannot lie, if He said something was not near, then it was not near.

**Sixth** ➔ As a result of this unchanging attribute, God is, in fact, *bound by time*. That is *He is bound by time statements that He made*, when He made time statements about events to happen on time bound earth!

**Seventh** ➔ Thus, not only *could* God communicate time statements objectively, He *would do so because of His nature*, and thus, He *did* do so!

In the Bible, God spoke to *man*. The time statements about the kingdom's establishment, for instance, were made to *man* about events to occur in man's world. The time statements were spoken to encourage or to warn man. If God did not mean *time* when He used time words, what did He mean?<sup>1</sup> Since man thinks in time when "a long time" or "at hand" is used, would it not have been misleading on God's part to say something was "not near," when in fact it was near? Conversely, would it not have been misleading for God to say something was "at hand," when it was really not to happen for centuries?

God either *could* or *couldn't* and either *did* or *didn't* speak the truth about *when* things were to occur. If He didn't or couldn't *He is not God*. If He *could* but *didn't*, His motives are called into question. If He *could* and *did*, then it is time to rethink traditionally held views!

The question is one of communication. Can God communicate understandably with His creation, or does He speak in purposely ambiguous ways? Does the Lord hold out a carrot stick of imminent blessings to His hurting creation while knowing all the time He is not *really* going to bring the promises soon? Did God constantly threaten nations with imminent judgment, and not punish them for centuries?<sup>2</sup> Where then is the reality of the threat to the wicked? Does God's transcendence over time prevent him from speaking to man in words that convey genuine nearness?

Consider this: if God is in the practice of saying something is near, when in reality it may not transpire for centuries, why is there not one single Old Covenant prophecy of the kingdom that said it was "at hand?" Why do we not find even one prophecy of the Messiah, made hundreds of years before his incarnation, that said he was near?

Conversely, when did God say something was *not* near, and that event actually took place soon? You see, if time statements don't mean anything objectively, then God could have, and perhaps even should have, said that events that

were in fact near, were "a long time away," and events that were a long time away, He should have said they were "near!" The reason Jehovah did not do this is because *God Can Tell Time, and because God spoke honestly about time!* When the events were actually near, He *said* they were at hand. When events were a long time off, Jehovah *said* they were not near.

Daniel said the kingdom would be established in the days of the Roman Empire. He called it **"the last days"** (2:28). From Daniel's perspective it was hundreds of years away. From God's perspective of course, it was only a moment, but that is not the issue. God was speaking to Daniel about things to happen in *man's world—not* in eternity. This is why God did not cause Daniel to say the kingdom was "near," "at hand," "right at the door," or coming "very, very soon."

It was not until John the Baptizer came that the message **"the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** was preached. And, the kingdom was established in the very generation that heard John say it was at hand (Luke 21:28-32; Colossians 1:13). In other words, God did not allow His prophets to say the kingdom was at hand until it was *really at hand!* It would have been less than honest if God had said the kingdom was imminent when it was really hundreds of years away.

Why did Isaiah, who wrote 700 years before the birth of the Messiah, *never* say his coming was at hand? Would it not have been terribly distressing for the Jews to have heard a constant message of the nearness of the kingdom and their savior, yet hundreds of years roll on and on without fulfillment? The writer of Proverbs correctly noted mankind's attitude toward waiting for fulfillment of promises **"Hope that is deferred makes the heart sick"** (13:12).

It is one thing for God to promise something, and not give any indication as to when He would fulfill the promise, for then man has no indication of when to expect fulfillment. It is an entirely different thing for God to indicate a time frame for fulfillment, and not bring the promise to fulfillment in that indicated time frame. This involves a basic attribute of the nature of God.

## God Is Faithful

In II Peter 3:8, we find the statement, **"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years,"** etc. (By the way, please note the verse does not say one day IS a thousand years with the Lord. Some millennialists insist earth will only stand for six thousand years followed by a thousand years of Utopia. This is based on a mistaken association with the days of creation and II Peter 3. Further, the turn of the century without the end of the age has effectively disproved the theory that each of the days of Creation equal a thousand years. The posit that the turn of the century was to bring in the seven thousandth year, i.e. the millennium, the Day of Rest, has been effectively discredited by the passing of time.)

In 2 Peter 3:9, we find an oft overlooked statement: **"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness"** (NASV). The word translated "slow" (Greek *braduno*) means just that. Compare Paul's usage of the term in I Timothy 3:15. Peter's point is that if God sets a time for fulfillment He fulfills it on time. He is not slow, God can tell time, and knows how to keep His promises on time. This verse asserts in no uncertain terms that God is a God who keeps His promises! Notice the inherent contradiction between this inspired statement and the claims of men today.

The premillennialist admits Jehovah promised to establish the kingdom in the days of the Roman Empire, and that Jesus said the kingdom was at hand (Matthew 4:17). Unfortunately however, God was unable to complete His promise due to the unbelief of the Jews. Therefore, God postponed the kingdom to a later date. But wait.

What happened to Peter's inspired statement that God is not slow about fulfilling His promises? What about *the, faithfulness of God* that the Hebrew writer asserts (Hebrews 6:18)? That writer insists "God cannot lie." Well, if He cannot lie, can He *fail*, or alter His promises?<sup>3</sup>

If the millennialist is right, and the appointed time for fulfillment has come and gone, yet God has not fulfilled the promise, has God not been *extremely slow* in fulfilling His kingdom promises? Has *His faithfulness* not been seriously called into question? If God is as slow as the millennial doctrine implies, how can we be assured of *any* of His promises?

We maintain that the faithfulness of God demands that He keep His word not only in the way He promised *but when He promised to keep it as well.* The *time-frame* for fulfillment is as important as the *how* of fulfillment!

The normal interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8 flies in the face of logic and consistency. We are told that God was having Peter to express His timelessness, in order to deflect disappointment, and skepticism about the delay in the *parousia*. Since God is above time, we are to believe, even though He *said* the Day of the Lord was near, His timelessness means that we should not take those statements too seriously.

Does 2 Peter 3:8 mean that God said, "I know I said the end was near, but I didn't really mean it!?"

On the other hand, we are told that God did, in fact, have His inspired writers to affirm, repeatedly, that the end of the age was at hand (1 Corinthians 10:11), that they were living the last days (Hebrews 1:1; 1 Peter 1:20), and that the end had drawn near (1 Peter 4:7). The reason He had the writers to say such things is that He wanted the church to live "on the tiptoe of expectation."<sup>3</sup> In other words, God inspired the New Testament writers to say that the end was near, even though He *knew it wasn't*, to keep the church's sense of expectancy vibrant through the centuries until the Lord finally comes.

In this scenario, on the one hand God said something that was not *actually* true, i.e. **"The end of all things has drawn near"** (1 Peter 4:7), in order to create a constant sense of expectation of the *parousia*. Then, to *offset* the sense of expectation created by that (untrue) promise, He caused Peter to say that time statements from Him don't mean anything, because He is timeless!

Are we to believe that God said something, in order to create a (false) sense of expectation, and then, when that sense of expectation was created, He turned around and said He didn't mean what He said? Does it create faith in God's *faithfulness* to say He said something misleading, or does it call His faithfulness into question?

God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Yet, if the Lord intended to negate His own imminent *parousia* statements, by saying, **"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day"**, then surely it can honestly be said that this is a matter of serious confusion! This is especially true in the books of Peter.

In 1 Peter, the apostle repeatedly affirms, in the strongest language possible, that the end was near. In chapter 1:5f, he said the salvation foretold by the ancient prophets, the salvation to be revealed at the appearing of Christ, was **"ready to be revealed in the last time"**, and they were living in the last times (v. 18-20). The word "ready" is from the Greek word *hetoimos*, and indicates a strong sense of nearness.

In 1 Peter 4:5, the apostle says that Jesus was **"ready (*hetoimos*) to judge the living and the dead."** In verse 7, as just seen, he said, **"The end of all things has drawn near."** The Greek (*eggiken*) is the perfect active indicative of *eggizo*, and does not mean simply "is at hand" as indicated by some translations. It literally means "has drawn near."

Further, Peter said, **"The time (from *kairos*, appointed time) has come for the judgment (to *krino*) to begin at the house of God"** (4:17). The Greek has the definite article to indicate that not *some* judgment was near, but *the* divinely appointed time for the judgment had come.

It is abundantly clear therefore, that Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not only believed, but taught as truth, that the end of the age and the coming of the Lord was very near when he wrote. Yet, the normal interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8 would have us to believe that Peter, after affirming so strongly that the end was near, turned around and tried to negate everything he had said!

If the Lord *wanted* to honestly say that the end of the age was near, would the words "The end of all things has drawn near" not convey that message? What other words would *honestly* communicate true nearness?

Let's be candid. Are those who appeal to 2 Peter 3 to mitigate the time statements willing to say that *God did not communicate honestly* when He said, **"The coming of the Lord has drawn near,"** and, **"the end of all things has drawn near"**? Those statements are either true or false within the framework of man's time bound world, and most assuredly Jehovah *knew* the

statements were true or false. So which is it? Did God inspire the NT writers to say something that was not actually true? Did God *knowingly mislead* the church to believe the *parousia* was near? This an incredibly important issue, to say the very least.

Those who attempt to use 2 Peter 3:8 to prove that "at hand," and "shortly," do not indicate true nearness, should ask this question, If "at hand" can mean "a long time," actually involving centuries, then what did God mean when He said something was *"not near"*?

Many commentators who deny the actual nearness of the Lord's *coming* in the first century, by appealing to 2 Peter 3:8, are guilty of serious inconsistency. Coffman for instance, appeals to 2 Peter 3:8 to mitigate the many declarations of the imminent *parousia*. In other words, "at hand" does not mean near. In his attempt to counter the language of imminence, he appeals to Matthew 25, and the parables of the Ten Virgins and the parable of the Talents.<sup>4</sup>

Coffman insists that the references to the "delay" of the Bridegroom, and the absence of the Master for "a long time," refer to the centuries since the ascension of Jesus. Thus, to Coffman, and his views are representative, in scripture, "at hand" may actually mean "a long time," and when scripture said something was "not near" this definitely meant "a long time!" "Near" can't mean near, but "not near" can't mean soon!

One is forced to ask, in the face of such confused, and confusing, argumentation, what words *can* indicate nearness? What words will such commentators allow to indicate an event was to occur soon? Where is the logic in saying that "at hand" and "near" do not mean anything, but "a long time" must be taken to mean hundreds of years?

Even more amazing is that these same commentators will actually appeal to the language of imminence to counter what they consider false doctrine. Jackson for instance, when arguing against millennialism, says, in regard to the establishment of the kingdom, **"John the Baptizer, Jesus himself, and the twelve disciples, all preached that the kingdom was 'at hand', literally meaning 'is come near.'** (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) (Compare Luke 21:30 for the meaning of 'at hand'). **Thus, they preached the nearness of the kingdom of God, and such can scarcely be harmonized with the notion that it hasn't come!"**<sup>5</sup>

Thus, to deny the language of imminence—at least in regard to the establishment of the kingdom—is infidelity. Yet, these same commentators will then deny that the *identical words*, in the *identical Greek tenses*, actually indicate time at all when used to speak of the coming of the Lord. More on this below. Consistency truly is a jewel so rare!

Consider this. As seen above, it is argued that 2 Peter 3:8 means that since God is transcendent, man cannot fathom what He means when He says something is at hand. However, do you realize that this is the only kind of Biblical statements that men make this argument about?

The Bible says God is so far above man, in every way possible, **"My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts"** (Isaiah 55:8-9). Is there *any* area in which God is *not* transcendent? Is He not also transcendent in respect of love, of mercy, of grace? Can anyone name an area in which God is exactly like man?

Can God speak clearly about Love, but not about time? Can He communicate objectively about Grace, but not about *when* His Grace would appear? What is it about time, that prohibits God from speaking honestly about *when* things were to happen?

In spite of this transcendence, most Bible students insist that Jehovah sent the Spirit to communicate to man in ways that man could, and should understand Him. That is, unless we are speaking of God's time statements! Then, all of a sudden, men appeal to the transcendence of Jehovah, and claim that His words are beyond comprehension. They are elastic and subjective.

If this is true in regard to time words, why is it not true in regard to *all* of God's words? Is God able to communicate clearly and honestly when it comes to *love*, but not about *time*? Is He able to make us understand His grace, but not *when* that grace would appear (Luke 21:28-32)? Is He able to stir our souls, honestly, with His message of salvation, and yet, we are not supposed to comprehend His message of when that salvation was to come (1 Peter 1:5-10)?

Consistency and logic demands that if we are going to appeal to Jehovah's transcendence, in order to mitigate the New Testament time statements, then we must, on the identical basis, give up any hope of understanding His statements about love, mercy, grace, and salvation.

Those who appeal to 2 Peter 3 to mitigate the language of the imminent *parousia*, are creating a totally new, untenable, definition of Biblical words.<sup>6</sup>

This is illustrated by the millennial definition of "imminence." The following edited excerpt is taken from my book *Who Is This Babylon?*

Thomas Ice cites with approval the definition of Showers:

*"An imminent event is one that is always 'hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand in its incidence' (Oxford English Dictionary, 1901, v. 66.) Thus, imminence carries the sense that it could happen at any moment. Other things may happen before the imminent event, but nothing else must take place before it happens. If something else must take place before it happens then that event is not imminent. In other words, the necessity of something else taking place first destroys the concept of imminency...As I hope you can see by now, 'imminent' is not equal to 'soon'."*<sup>7</sup>

It is specious to say something is *imminent*, but not *at hand*. The Oxford dictionary quote actually says something imminent is, "close at hand." This is a desperate attempt to destroy NT time statements.

Ice lists 14 passages that speak of the nearness of Jesus' coming and says, *"As we consider these passages, we note that Christ may come at any moment—that the rapture is actually imminent. Only pretribulationism can give a full, literal meaning to such an any-moment event."* {*Prophecy*, 106+} However, to cite passages that said Christ's coming was near 2000 years ago, and say they mean *it is imminent now*, is anachronism exemplified. The Bible writers did not say there was *the possibility* that Christ's coming was near. They affirmed, **"in a very, very little while, He that will come, will come, and will not delay!"** (Hebrews 10:37).

It is revealing that Ice does not quote a single verse that says, **"Brethren, we shall not all sleep"** (1 Corinthians 15:50f). He ignores, **"There are some standing here that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming"** (Matthew 16:27-28). He omits, **"those of us who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord"** (1 Thessalonians 4:15,17). These are not statements of "hope so," or, "could be," These are inspired statements made two thousand years ago to living people. The statements affirm that Christ would positively return in their generation.

Ice affirms that the 14 verses prove Christ's coming was "imminent," but of course, not *near*, in the first century. He also says the necessity for any predictive event to occur before the imminent event destroys imminence. However, the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem was, by Ice's admission, a predicted event that had to happen before Christ's coming. Therefore, the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, per Ice's logic, means that Christ's coming was not actually "imminent" like the New Testament writers affirmed.

Ice, citing Showers again, claims, "A person cannot legitimately set or imply a date for its happening. As soon as a person sets a date for an imminent event he destroys the concept of imminency, because he is thereby saying 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." (Ice, 106)

This is misguided. It overlooks the fact that the Lord, "**appointed a Day**" in which He would judge the world (Acts 17:30-31). In light of that *appointed Day*, He informed His followers that the Day "**has drawn near**" (James 5:8). Did that nullify or magnify imminence? Was the Spirit lying to Peter when He inspired him to affirm, "**The time (kairos, appointed time, DKP) has come for the judgment to begin**" (1 Peter 4:17)? It is the Father that set the Day, and the Father caused Peter to say the appointed time had come. Nearness was *not minimized*, it was *emphasized*!

Plainly, to argue that the time statements of scripture mean "imminent but not soon" is a desperate and specious attempt to maintain a futurist eschatology. It destroys the meaning of words, and creates meanings unknown in the lexicons. It is unworthy of those who would honor the authority and inspiration of scripture.

## God and Time

In spite of the issue of the faithfulness of God some writers insist we must believe in what they call the "*elasticity of prophetic chronology*;" and that "*time, in connection with prophecy, is an exceedingly relative matter.*" We are told that prophetic time may INDICATE imminence when in fact hundreds of years are involved. In order to demonstrate the utter falsity of this concept let us see how God has dealt with time statements in scripture.

In Numbers 24:17-18 Balaam the prophet made a prediction of Christ's coming: "**I see him but not now, I behold him but not near.**" Notice he said Christ's coming was NOT NEAR; IT WAS NOT AT HAND. Why did he say this? Because Christ's coming was over 1400 years away, and 1400 years really is a long time! Here is a concrete example where God referred to a long time as just that.

In Daniel 10-12 is a vision encompassing a period of time from 536 BC to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD; about 600 years. Two times in this text Daniel was told "**the appointed time is long**" and "**the vision refers to many days to come**" (10:1,14). Remember, this vision was relayed to Daniel from God. While God is not bound by time, he was communicating to man who is bound to time. God called this 600 year period of time "long;" he said it involved "**many days.**" God can most assuredly tell time and read a calendar!

Daniel contains another important example of how God used time words. Chapter 8 contains a prophecy that extends from 530 BC to about 165-164 BC and the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. The time covered is about 365 years. How did God express the prophecy? Did he say it was at hand? Did he say SOME of it was at hand while some of it was for a long time off? No! God viewed the prophecy as a whole. He said the vision "**refers to many days in the future**" (8:26). Here is a prophecy that covers 365 years and God called it "a long time." Friends, if God called 365 years a long time, how can man say that time, when God is speaking to man, means nothing?

If "at hand" can mean a long time, even centuries, then why can't "a long time" mean *soon*, or maybe even "this generation"?

This is an important question in light of the traditional interpretations of Revelation. Daniel was told to seal up his vision because the time for its fulfillment was a long time away—365 years. John was specifically told NOT TO SEAL UP HIS VISION BECAUSE WHAT HE SAW WAS AT HAND! John is told his vision, not part of his vision, was "**at hand**" and "**must shortly come to pass!**" Reader, did God call the 365 years for the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy a "long time" and call the fulfillment of Revelation, which most commentators say has not been fulfilled *after 2000 years so far*, "at hand?" To say the least, this would hardly be consistent!

In Jeremiah 29:10, Jehovah told Israel the Babylonian captivity would last for seventy years. In verse 28, the people complained that Jehovah said, "The exile will be long." Jehovah called seventy years a "long time." Why? Because to man seventy years *is a long time*. Thus, God used time words as man would normally understand them. God can tell time when speaking to man.

Jehovah told Israel, through Jeremiah, that the Babylonian captivity would be long. However, in Jeremiah 27:16, the false prophets told Israel that the captivity would *not* be long. Instead, they promised, "**The vessels of the Lord's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon.**" This is remarkable.

In Ezekiel 7, God said the Day of the Lord was at hand. The Day of the Lord in this context was when God used Babylon to punish Israel for her sin. It is not an "end of time" idea. It is when God used a nation to punish another as it related to His chosen people.

God said "at hand." Israel said "not at hand," and God condemned them! God said "not at hand." Israel said "at hand," and God condemned them. Man said God cannot tell time. God proved man wrong!

In chapter 11, Israel responded to the threat of coming judgment. They insisted that although Ezekiel said it was at hand, it was really not. It was time to build houses, not worry about judgment. One can almost hear some of those people: "Well, yes, Ezekiel *said* the Day of the Lord is at hand, but after all, 'one day is

with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day' (Psalms 90:4)."

When Israel "elasticized" God's words of imminence into relativity, God responded. In Ezekiel 12:21f, (Please, take the time to get your Bible, and read it for yourself!), Adonai told Ezekiel to tell Israel that her days of changing the time for His predictions were over. He had said judgment was at hand. Israel said it was not at hand. Jehovah would not tolerate it.

Ezekiel was instructed to tell Israel that in *that generation* judgment would fall just as Jehovah had indicated when He said it was at hand. (Have you read those verses for yourself yet? If not, do it now [this passage is included below], and see for yourself that what we are saying is true.) What we have then, is an example of man saying that while God had said something was near, it really was not. It was for a long time off. We have God's response. When God said "at hand" He meant "at hand." He did not mean hundreds of years, He meant "soon."

***21 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 22 "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'? 23 Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel." But say to them, "The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25***

***For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord God.' " 26 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' 28 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord God.' " Ezekiel 12:21-28 (NKJV)***

In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, then, when God said something (captivity) was *near*, Israel said it was *not near*, and God condemned them. When God said something (deliverance) was *not near*, Israel said it was *near*, and God condemned them! There could be no greater refutation of the claim that "prophetic time statements are extremely elastic." God meant what He said, and said what He meant when He said "near" or "not near."

Another example of man changing the meaning of God's time words is in Amos 6:3. God warned Israel the time had come for her to be judged (8:2, Hosea 1:4). In spite of the warnings, Israel ***"put far off the evil day."*** Isaiah 56:12 shows they were saying ***"tomorrow shall be as today."*** In spite of God's warning that judgment was at hand, they insisted, ***"All things continue as they were,"*** (cf. II Peter 3:3-4). They refused to believe God meant "near" when He said "at hand." As a result God said "Woe" to them!"

What is the difference between Israel of Old denying that "at hand" meant "soon," and Bible students today who read the New Testament time statements, and say they did not mean "soon?" What is the difference between those in Isaiah's day who denied the warnings of imminent judgment, saying life was going to go on as usual, and those today who read the New Testament time statements, and say the predicted events were not truly near? Those who deny the first century application of the at hand time statements of the New Testament are doing the same thing as the Israelites of Old—denying that "at hand" meant "soon!"

God condemned Israel for changing "at hand" into a "long time." Is it justifiable for modern man to do the same so when studying the New Testament? Israel apparently argued that time doesn't mean anything to God. By the way, they had Psalms 90:4 when Amos and Ezekiel was written. Were they appealing to this as justification for saying "at hand" did not mean soon? When they so argued, God condemned their rationalization. What has changed to allow modern man to go to New Covenant promises that certain events were "at hand," and change those statements of imminence to make them say they have not been fulfilled after two thousand years so far?

Has God changed His vocabulary? Is it true that "at hand" once *did* mean "near" but now it can mean "a long time?" If so, where is the evidence for the change? God can *still* tell time. When God said something was at hand, it was near. For man to argue otherwise is to reject the inspiration of the scriptures. It is to impugn the faithfulness of God. It is to impugn the ability of God to communicate. It is to do the very thing Israel of old did, and for which they were condemned! This is a very serious matter indeed.

To follow up on this issue, consider the following. If God cannot, and does not see time as man does, in regard to events to occur in man's world, then how is it possible for scripture to affirm that God is very much aware of time? Daniel was told that the kingdom of God would be established ***"in the days of these kings"*** (Daniel 2:44), that is, in the days of the Roman Empire. God had to *calculate time* from the days of Babylon until the time of Rome in order to make such a time prediction. If time doesn't mean anything to God, how could He make such a prediction?

Paul said, ***"God has appointed a day, in which He is about to (mello) judge the world"*** (Acts 17:30-31). Now, if time is so elastic, how could God pick a time on the calendar? Clearly, God understands time, marks time and speaks of time, *according to the calendar that He established!*

Paul said **"at just the right time"** Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6f). How did the Lord know it was just the right time, if He is so transcendent over time that it means nothing to Him? The apostle also said **"in the fullness of time, God sent forth His son"** (Galatians 4:4). How did the timeless God know the time was right to send His son? Because *God can tell time*. He knew, and acted, because He bound Himself to act within the time constraints of the time-bound world He created.

## LUKE 21:8: THE DIVINE TIME LINE

When Jesus' disciples asked him about the end of the age (Matthew 24:2), Jesus began to explain the events that had to happen before that consummative event. However, he warned them that before the end would come there would be false signs, and false prophets saying the end was near when it was not actually near: **"Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore, do not go after them."**

Jesus proceeded to give two major events that would signal the nearness of the end: **"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to the nations, then comes the end. Therefore, when you see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,...then let those who are in Judea flee."** After giving these signs, Jesus said, **"When you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the door"** (Matthew 24:33). The fulfillment of the World Mission, and the appearance of the Abomination would signal that the end truly had drawn near.

This is extremely important. Jesus was speaking to living breathing human beings, and told them that *they* would see these events. He was not speaking abstractly. He told his disciples that *they* would experience false teachers saying the end was near, (or present!), when in fact it was not. And, all of these things happened very early in the first century.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul had to write to the church to warn them not to believe the Lord had already come!<sup>9</sup> Just as Jesus said false prophets would come saying the end had come, or had drawn near, before it was, Paul had to deal with that problem at an early time (circa A.D. 49).

Jesus told his disciples that they would see the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the Abomination of Desolation, and when they did, they would know that the end truly had drawn near. This is critical.

In Romans, (57-59 A.D.), Paul wrote that the gospel had been preached into all the world.<sup>10</sup> In Colossians 1:5-7, 23, Titus 2:11-13, etc. (60-62 A.D.), the apostle declared that the gospel had been preached **"to every creature under heaven" "to all men," "all the world"** etc. It is also at this time that Paul proclaimed that Jesus' parousia was **"at hand,"** (Philippians 4:5), and that Peter—the author of 2 Peter 3:8— stated **"the end of all things has drawn near...the time has come for the judgment to begin"** (1 Peter 4:7, 17), and that James wrote **"the coming of the Lord has drawn near."**

**Only Jesus' first century apostles were authorized to say when the end was near. Those before them who said it was near, were false. Those after them who say it is near are wrong. They are the only ones who could know, and they said it was near in the first century!**

The time line in these texts is critical. At an early time, false prophets appeared in fulfillment of Jesus predictions, saying the end had drawn near, or had come. The apostles, cognizant of Jesus' warnings, rejected those prophets, reminding the disciples of what had to happen before the end could come. Then, some 10 years later, with the fulfillment of the first of the two major signs given by Jesus, the inspired writers say that the end had drawn near!

Jesus had said **"When you see these things you will know it,** (the parousia, DKP), **is at the door"** (Matthew 24:33). James, living at the time when he witnessed the fulfillment and appearance of the signs, and echoing the very words of Jesus said, "He is at the door!"(James 5:9).

This divine time line teaches us some important lessons. It shows that it truly was Jesus' generation that was to see the signs Jesus foretold. Jesus was not saying that the fulfillment of the World Mission, or the appearance of the Abomination, was to be centuries in the future.

This time line, coupled with the apostles' rejection of the message of those who said the end was already present, also shows that the events were fulfilled in the first century.

This time line, when related to the later epistles, after the fulfillment of the first of the two major signs given by Jesus, in which the inspired writers emphatically stated, **"In a very, very little while, the one who is coming will come, and will not delay"** (Hebrews 10:37), proves that their time statements must be taken literally. Jesus had told them they could tell when the end had *not drawn near*, and he had told them when they could tell *it had drawn near!*



Thus, when the Biblical writers, writing in light of Jesus' warnings, said that what he had foretold was fulfilled, and that the end had drawn near, we cannot extrapolate those statements of nearness two thousand years into the future. We cannot elasticize their statements of "at hand," into meaninglessness. All statements that the end was near, made *before* the inspired writers said it was near, were false. All statements that the end *is* near, written or stated *after* the Biblical writers said it was near, are false statements. The only preachers, the only prophets, the only teachers who were ever given divine insight into the time of Jesus' return were Jesus' first century inspired disciples, and they said that the end had drawn near 2000 years ago! If their statements that the end was near were as wrong as those before them, *then they too were false teachers.*

Note again that Jesus told his disciples that *fellow believers* would say the end had drawn near, when in fact it had not (Luke 21:8). He told his apostles to reject those false prophets. However, he then gave them the signs by which they could themselves know the end was near (Matthew 24:32-33). The disciples, upon seeing the fulfillment of the first of those signs began to declare that the end was near. However, modern commentators tell us that they could not actually declare Christ's coming was near (see below) and thus, all of their statements that the end was near cannot be true. This means, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus' apostles were just as guilty of false teaching concerning the time of the parousia as those who said it was near before they did!

What is the difference between the Christians, that Jesus called false teachers, who prematurely said the end was near, and the apostles, who heralded that *very same message in the same generation*? If those *before* the Bible writers were wrong, because their predictions were false, then the NT writers were equally wrong, *the identical reason!* Was there no difference between the message of those *before* the disciples who said **"the end has drawn near,"** and the message of *the apostles themselves* who said "the end has drawn near?" If Jesus was not speaking to *his first century apostles about their generation*, then their predictions, that the end had drawn near, have become, in effect, the very predictions Jesus said must be rejected as false! If the predictions of those *before* the apostles, and those of the apostles failed, then the apostles do indeed stand as false teachers.

Finally, the time line of Luke 21:8 destroys the commonly stated view that God caused the apostles to make all of the emphatic time statements about the nearness of the end in order to keep the church of each successive generation "on the tiptoe of expectation." It also disproves the interpretation of Matthew 24:34, that Jesus did not mean *his generation* would see his coming, but instead, meant that the generation to see the signs would be the final generation, and that, when the signs would appear, believers could finally know that the end was actually be near.

These views are wrong because Jesus emphatically condemned the pronouncement of the nearness of the end *before it was actually near!* And since the *apostles* did declare that the end was near in their generation, if the end was not truly near, then the NT writers are some of the very false teachers that Jesus warned about! He said many would come saying **"The end has drawn near,"** but condemned that premature message and its messengers. In other words, *the church throughout countless generations is not to have the continual message that the end is near!* The *only generation* that was to proclaim the message of the soon coming end was to be the generation that would see the end! Believers were to reject any message of the imminent end that was not the inspired word of the apostles. To suggest that God gave all of the NT statements that the end was near to create a sense of urgency, when in fact the end was not near, flies in the face of Jesus' teaching in Luke 21:8. Jesus *clearly* did not want believers to say the end was near *until it was near!* And this means that when He inspired them to say it was near, then, *it was truly near!*

All of this evidence proves conclusively that to appeal to 2 Peter 3:8, in order to mitigate the many NT time statements, is a misuse of the text. God is faithful. God can tell time, and He speaks truthfully *about* time!

## WHAT ABOUT MATTHEW 24:36?

It is also common for commentators to appeal to Matthew 24:36 to prove that the time statements of the nearness of the end in the first century should not be taken literally. Speaking of His coming, Jesus said, **"But of that day and hour, no one knows. Not the Son, nor the angels, but the Father only."** John MacArthur says that *Jesus' ignorance of the time of His coming excuses the non-occurrence of the parousia in the first century. Or, at the very least, it mitigates all of the statements about the nearness of that event.*<sup>11</sup>

Wayne Jackson, commenting on James 5:8, says that James *"could not have been predicting the literally imminent return of the Savior, for such knowledge was not made available to the Lord's penmen. Not even the Lord himself knew the time of his return to earth (Matthew 24:36)."*<sup>12</sup> In other words, because Jesus could not circle a day on the calendar, *while on earth*, this is taken to mean that he could not know the *generation* of his appearing. This supposedly means that even though the apostles and inspired writers of the epistles said the Lord's coming was near, because Jesus, while on earth, did not know the day and hour of his coming, the disciples writings cannot be taken at face value.

The NT writers said Jesus was coming **"in a very, very little while"** (Hebrews 10:37). Look closely at the list of passages on page 19f.. Jackson argues that they could not have predicted the literally imminent coming of the Lord because *"that knowledge was not given to them."* He says this is true because while Jesus was on earth, he did not know the "day and hour" of his coming. It is significant, however, that Jackson, perhaps inadvertently, does admit that, *"There are passages which seem to speak of the nearness of the Lord's coming—from a first century perspective."* He says this in reference to James 5:8. One can only wonder, if the Lord intended for the first century disciples to believe that the *parousia* actually

was near, would the words **"the coming (parousia, DKP) of the Lord has drawn near"** have been sufficient to convey that message? Indeed! The words do more than *seem* to convey the idea of nearness, *they express nearness quite well!*

Furthermore, in light of the discussion on Luke 21:8, if the disciples were not given the *truth* concerning the imminent parousia, then they were not one whit truer than the teachers that Jesus told them to reject, the teachers that truly were not given to know the time of Christ's coming! If the knowledge of the time of the parousia was not given to the inspired writers they were as wrong in their declarations of the nearness of the end as were those that Jesus condemned!

It is wrong to use Matthew 24:36 to mitigate the time statements in the epistles. To suggest that because Jesus did not know the exact time of his coming *while he was still on earth*, does not mean that the disciples could not know, by inspiration, when it was near, *after Jesus' ascension and sending of the Spirit*. It is true that in Matthew 24:36, Jesus did not know *the day or the hour* of His coming. It is *not true*, however, that He did not know the *generation*. He emphatically stated the contrary, **"Verily I say unto you, this generation shall by no means pass until all these things be fulfilled."** And, the **"all these things"** included His coming on the clouds with power and great glory of verses 29-31.

In John 16, Jesus told His disciples that there were many things He could not yet tell them, but that the Father would send the Spirit, who would reveal to them **"things to come"** (John 16:7). The Spirit was to reveal to the disciples what Jesus could not reveal to them while He was on earth. What was to be revealed was **"things to come."** In other words, what Jesus did not know while He was on earth, was to be revealed by the Spirit *after Christ's ascension*. Jackson even seems to admit this in another article, where he is not writing against preterism, **"Is it not rather ironical that Christ, who gave these "signs," (of Matthew 24, DKP), did not know (while on earth), (my emphasis, DKP) when his return would take place."**<sup>13</sup> Jackson seems to know, although he does not elaborate on the meaning of this, that Christ's ignorance of the time of His coming *was limited to His time on earth*.

Jesus did send the Spirit, and the Spirit revealed to the disciples things that Jesus could not reveal to them while he was on earth. Thus, when we read the epistles, all *written after the sending of the revelatory Spirit*, and they say that the coming of the Lord had drawn near, we must accept their statements as the inspired revelation of God. This means that their statements about the nearness of Christ's coming were true. They were not the statements of hope, or of personal belief versus fact. It means that what Jesus could not reveal while he was on earth, was now being revealed by the inspiration of the revelatory Spirit.

When arguing against Covenant Eschatology, Jackson says the NT writers could not have said the *parousia* was near, because that knowledge was not given to them, and cites Matthew 24:36 as proof. This indicates that he is claiming that even *after Christ's ascension*, Jesus did not know the time, and could not, or did not reveal it to the disciples. However, when not addressing the issue of time, he tacitly admits that *while on earth*, Jesus did not know the time. This opens the door to the possibility that after the ascension *He did know the time, and could have revealed it to the disciples*. If it be admitted for even one moment that the time of the *parousia* was, or even *could have been*, revealed to Christ *after His ascension*, then the argument that the disciples, inspired by the Spirit sent by the Father, could not have known that the *parousia* was near, becomes a false argument.

It is a denial of the revelatory work of the Spirit to insist that because Jesus did not know the time of His coming *while on earth*, that this same "ignorance" prevailed after His ascension, and the sending of the Spirit.

As we will see below, the disciples certainly *claimed* that they had (inspired) knowledge that Christ's coming was near. If the knowledge that the **"end of all things has drawn near"** (1 Peter 4:7), was not "given" to the writers by the Spirit, *where did they get the idea?* Did they just make it up? Were they wrong? The words are not uncertain, they are emphatic and clear, **"The coming (Greek, parousia) of the Lord has drawn near"** (James 5:8). Interestingly, *the identical Greek word, in the identical tense* is used in this verse that is used in Matthew 3:2, **"The kingdom of heaven is at hand."** Consider the following:

If the disciples could not know that the *parousia* was at hand because that knowledge was not given to them, then *on the identical basis, they could not know the establishment of the kingdom was at hand either!*

Jackson cites Matthew 24:36 to prove that the disciples—even after the ascension and sending of the revelatory Spirit—could not know the *parousia* was near. Well, in Acts 1:6f, the disciples asked Jesus **"Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"**<sup>14</sup> Jesus responded, **"It is not for you to know the times and the seasons."**

Now here is something strange. In Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 10, and other texts, the disciples proclaimed **"The kingdom of God is at hand!"** (Luke 10:9). Jackson says **"John the Baptizer, Jesus himself, and the twelve disciples, all preached that the kingdom of heaven is 'at hand,' literally meaning 'has come near.'**" (Compare Luke 21:30 for the meaning of 'at hand.') *Thus, they preached the nearness of the kingdom of God, and such can scarcely be harmonized with the notion that it hasn't come!*<sup>15</sup>

Notice that Jackson says "at hand" *literally* means "has come near," and yet, as we have noted above, *the exact same word and tense* translated "at hand" in Matthew, Mark, and Luke 10, is used by Peter to say **"the end of all things has come near,"** (1 Peter 4:7), and by James to say, **"the parousia has come near"** (James 5:8). Yet, Jackson says Peter and James could not have been saying that Christ's coming was literally at hand.

Jackson has not seen, or perhaps refuses to see, that while the "times and seasons" i.e. the "day and hour" for the establishing of the kingdom was not initially revealed to the disciples, *what was revealed* was that it had "drawn near." Did the disciples declare the literally imminent establishment of the kingdom without knowing *the times and seasons* of its establishment? Surely. And, when was the "times and seasons" for the establishing of the kingdom revealed to the disciples? Was it not after the ascension, and after the sending of the revelatory Spirit? Yes, indeed. Well, if the "times and seasons" for the kingdom was revealed to the disciples after Pentecost, what turn of logic prevents us from concluding that the "day and hour" of the *parousia* was likewise revealed, after Pentecost and the sending of the revelatory Spirit? After all, this is what Revelation 1:1-3 (not to mention the other epistles) teaches.

The Apocalypse is: ***"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place...for the time is at hand"*** (Revelation 1:1-3). It is indisputable that the chain of revelation here indicates that the Father was giving the Son, who was in turn giving to the church, *the knowledge of things that were truly near*. What were those things? The answer is clear, ***"Behold I come quickly!"***

Thus, in Revelation, the Father, who alone knew the day and hour of Christ's coming while Jesus was on earth, is depicted as revealing to the Son that His coming was at hand, and must shortly take place! Thus, even based on Revelation alone, it is improper to use Matthew 24:36 to mitigate the statements concerning the nearness of the Lord's coming in the epistles.

The NT said ***"the kingdom of heaven has drawn near."*** Jackson argues that the disciples *did predict* the literally imminent coming of the kingdom, and this in spite of the fact that the knowledge of the "times and seasons" for the establishment of the kingdom, was not given to them. If the disciples could not "truthfully declare the literally imminent return of the Lord," "for such knowledge was not given to them," *then, for the exact same reason* they could not "truthfully declare the literally imminent establishment of the kingdom, for such knowledge was not given to them." Jackson is emphatic that the disciples *did* declare the literally imminent establishment of the kingdom without knowing the day and hour of its establishment. Yet, he declares that the disciples could not declare the literally imminent coming of the Lord because they did not know the day and hour! The logical inconsistency is apparent.

To put it another way, if the disciples could declare the literally imminent establishment of the kingdom without knowing "the times and the seasons," then it is irrefutably true that they could likewise declare the literally imminent parousia without knowing the "day and hour" of its occurrence. And this is especially true since they wrote of the nearness of the parousia *after the sending of the revelatory Spirit*.

It should be clear then, that the attempts to use Matthew 24:36 to counter all of the statements that Christ's coming was near in the first century are misguided. To apply the incarnation ignorance of Christ, to passages that were written *after His ascension* to the Father and sending of the revelatory Spirit, is a hermeneutic of anachronism. It takes situations that were true at one point, and applies them to another time and situation in which God's action had negated what was once true. What we find in the epistles is the Spirit inspired revelation that Jesus' Second Coming truly was near in the first century.

## Making an Application

If the time statements of the Bible are to be understood as truly communicating what the words themselves normally mean, and we have shown that they do, then the traditional views of eschatology are presented with some insurmountable problems. In other words, if "a long time" really meant a long time in man's concept of time, and if "at hand" truly meant nearness, then the traditional eschatological interpretations are false.

There are numerous New Testament passages that say, ***"The coming of the Lord is at hand,"*** or in other ways indicate Christ's return was imminent—and that was almost two thousand years ago! One of the ways men have dealt with the problem is to say "Yes, the Bible said the coming of the Lord was 'at hand' in the first century, but time doesn't mean anything to God, therefore, 'at hand' didn't mean it was near."

Do you see the problem? It is real, and has troubled Bible students for centuries. The question is **"Can God tell time?"** As we have seen, when God uses time words He does not have a special hidden meaning unknowable to man. Prophetic time statements are *not* so "elastic" that the words "near" and "at hand" can encompass thousands of years! At hand means at hand whether it referred to the coming of the kingdom or the coming of the Lord! (The amillennial view that separates the coming of the kingdom from the coming of the Lord is wrong. Jesus plainly associated his coming with the coming of the kingdom, Matthew 16:27-28; Matthew 25:31f; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 11:15f. Thus, for commentators like Jackson to insist that the coming of the kingdom was near, but that the Lord's coming was not, is erroneous).

If, as the amillennialist insists, it is dangerous to deny the time for the coming of the kingdom, why is it not equally dangerous to deny the time-frame for the coming of the Lord? Patently, to deny either the fact or the time for the coming of the Lord is to deny the inspiration of the scriptures.

This is a serious matter indeed. How clearly does the New Testament affirm the imminence of the coming of the Lord?

## A Look at the Evidence

1. Matthew 10:23--Jesus said he would return in the lifetime of his disciples.
2. Matthew 16:27-28--Jesus said he would return with his angels to judge all men before every one standing there died. Please read it!
3. Matthew 24:29-34--Jesus said he would return in the clouds with his angels--in that generation!
4. Acts 3:19ff--Peter said Jesus would return when all the Old Covenant prophets were fulfilled. If the Old Prophets have not been fulfilled the Old Covenant is still in effect, Matthew 5:17-18.
5. Romans 13:12--Paul said *"the day is at hand."*
6. Romans 16:20--Paul said God *"will crush Satan under your feet shortly."*
7. I Corinthians 1:4-8--Paul said the Corinthians would have the miraculous gifts until "the end," the Day of the Lord.
8. I Corinthians 7:28-31--Paul said *"the form of this world is passing away,"* and *"the time is short."*
9. I Corinthians 15:51f--Paul said not all of them then living would die before the resurrection.
10. Philippians 3:20-4:5--Paul spoke of the resurrection at Christ's coming and said *"The Lord is at hand."*
11. I Timothy 6:14--Paul told Timothy to live faithfully *"until the appearing of our Lord."*
12. Hebrews 9:28; 10:37--The writer said Christ would appear a second time for salvation and then asserted *"in a very, very little while he that will come will come, and will not tarry."* Isn't it sad that man says Christ HAS DELAYED, in spite of what this verse says? WHAT DOES INSPIRATION MEAN? DID THE WRITER LIE? WAS HE MISTAKEN?
13. James 5:7-9--James urged his readers to be faithful *"until the coming of the Lord;"* he says *"The coming of the Lord is at hand;"* and *"The judge is standing right at the door."*
14. I Peter 4:5,7,17--Peter said Jesus was then *"ready to judge the living and the dead;"* *"the end of all things is at hand;"* and *"the time is come for the judgment to begin at the house of God."*
15. I John 2:15-18--John said the world was passing away and *"it is the last hour."*
16. Revelation--this book says no less than ten times that its predictions *"must shortly come to pass,"* were *"at hand,"* were to happen *"quickly,"* there would be *"no more delay,"* etc, etc.

These are not by *any* means all the verses that either directly stated Christ's return was at hand in the first century, or indirectly taught it as true. What will you do with these verses in God's inspired word?

There is not one verse that uses language of imminence about the coming of the *kingdom* that is as strong as some of the language about the coming of the Lord? See Hebrews 10:37. Christ never said *"in a very, very little while the kingdom will come"* But the inspired writers said it about the coming of Jesus! If, as the amillennialist correctly insists, we must acknowledge the strong language of nearness in regard to the coming of the kingdom, must we not acknowledge the even stronger language that is used in reference to the coming of the Lord? If not, why not?

## Yes, But

Someone will respond to the above by saying "Wait, now, Christ has not returned because earth and time continue. Every man did not see him come back, therefore, he did not come back."

The problem here is one of preconceived ideas. The prevailing idea about Christ's return says he will come back bodily, on an actual cloud. Time will end as the physical earth is burned up, and all the dead are raised out of physical graves to stand before Christ to be judged.

Obviously, from a physical perspective all this has not happened. But is it just possible that this concept of the Day of the Lord is wrong?<sup>17</sup> If you have agreed with our investigation about God's use of time words you are forced to rethink your concept about the nature of the Day of the Lord, or else call the inspiration of scripture into question! Which will it be?

## The Day of the Lord

Space forbids a full discussion of the nature of the Day of the Lord. We recommend you obtain a copy of our *Babylon* book, listed in the back of this tract. Briefly however, we will give a brief definition of "the coming of the Lord."

Just as the restoration of the kingdom of Israel was a spiritual, not a physical restoration (Acts 1:6; 2:29f; 3:19f; 15:14f, etc), the return of Christ was a spiritual, not a physical, event as well.

In the Old Covenant the Day of the Lord was when Jehovah acted by "instrumental means" to judge a nation or people. The language used to describe the event sounds like the end of creation, but was only the end of the "world" under consideration. God was said to ride a cloud into Egypt in judgment. He did not bodily ride a cloud into Egypt. The Assyrians destroyed Egypt. But since God used the Assyrians He was said to come with the clouds (Isaiah 19-20).

Jehovah said that He was going to come out of heaven, with flaming fire, with a shout, in a hail storm, to destroy the Assyrians when they were besieging Jerusalem (Isaiah 30-31). He said He was going to deliver Jerusalem but not by the sword of man, and the Assyrians king would king would return home defeated. Isaiah 37:36 reveals that during the night the Angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. There was no literal hail storm, no flaming fire, no shout of the Lord, and Jehovah did not literally come out of heaven. However, since He acted, He was said to come.

God predicted Edom's destruction at the hands of the Babylonians (Isaiah 34), in what sounds like the end of material creation. Earth was to burn and melt, the stars would fall. This did not happen literally of course, but Edom was destroyed (Malachi 1:2-3), in B. C. 583. It was the Day of the In Psalms 18, David described in graphic detail how God had delivered

him from his enemies. He said God descended on the clouds, the earth was shaken, all creation was moved. This did not literally happen but is highly symbolic language to describe God's actions. The term for this is "apocalyptic language."

Apocalyptic language was never intended to be taken literally, and leads to contradictions when literalized. When Jesus promised to return with the clouds, he was using standard prophetic language to describe the time when he would put a full end to the Old World of Judaism. When Peter, II Peter 3, described the Day of the Lord when "heaven and earth" would perish, he was using Old Covenant apocalyptic language to predict the very same day Jesus spoke of, the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

In 70 A. D., Jesus destroyed the Old World of Judaism that had stood for 1500 years. The temple was the only place on earth where sacrifices could be offered, and only genealogically confirmed Levites could offer those sacrifices. National Israel had been God's chosen people to bring Messiah and his word. That purpose was now accomplished, and Israel had rejected her own Messiah and kingdom. Concurrently, God was establishing a New Covenant and a New People. When that New Covenant was fully delivered and confirmed, and when the Old Covenant people had fully rejected it, Christ came in judgment, taking that nation away. When Jerusalem was destroyed, Jesus was fully vindicated by the fulfillment of all prophecy (Luke 21:22). He was revealed to be at the right hand of power on high when his prediction of Jerusalem's fall came to pass. This was the coming of the Lord. In short, Jesus never predicted to bodily return to this earth. <sup>18</sup>

This simplified explanation will hopefully cause you to want to study more. You may not be familiar with these ideas, but we hope we have piqued your curiosity. See my other works for more information.

This fact remains. Jesus promised to return in the generation of his disciples. Language could not be clearer. We have demonstrated that when God used time words He meant what the words suggest, whether He said "at hand" or "long time." This being true one must acknowledge that either:

1. Jesus lied
2. He failed
3. He was mistaken,
4. Or He came!

The Bible is either inspired or it is not—I believe it is inspired. I also believe Jesus did not lie, fail, or make a mistake. This is why I have changed my mind about the nature of the coming of the Lord.

God truly can tell time. He can read a calendar, because He created the calendar! In the clearest language possible He predicted the time, not the day or hour, but the generation, of Christ's return. That was the first century generation. The only way to maintain a belief in the inspiration of the scriptures, and Jesus, is to be willing to believe He kept his words. This means a change in your beliefs about the nature of the coming. Are you willing to change?

## End Notes

1. It is sometimes argued that "at hand" conveyed the idea of *certainty*, but not nearness. Well, if this is true, then "not near" must convey *uncertainty*! This means that when Jehovah said something was "not near," He meant that it was *not certain* to occur!
2. Lamentably, some commentators believe this is exactly what Jehovah did! Wayne Jackson, attempting to mitigate the time statements of scripture, insists, for instance, that in Obadiah v.15-17, that while God said the "Day of the Lord is near" that the prediction has not even yet been fulfilled! He says, "A major fallacy of the preterist mentality is a failure to recognize the elasticity of chronological jargon within the context of biblical prophecy. It is a rather common trait in prophetic language that an event, while literally in the remote future, may be described as near. The purpose in this sort of language to is emphasize the *certainty* of the prophecy's fulfillment. Obadiah, for instance, foretold the final day of earth's history. Concerning that event, he said: "For the day of Jehovah is *near* upon all the nations..." (vs.15). This cannot refer to some local judgment, for "all nations" are to be involved. And yet, the event is depicted as "near." This is a blatantly false statement. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Edom within three years of the prophecy! *New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982)20.1 have given a full rebuttal of Jackson's claim on our website [www.eschatology.org](http://www.eschatology.org)
3. John MacArthur, *The Second Coming*, (Wheaton, Ill, Crossways Publishing, 1999)206. MacArthur, a premillennialist, says the time statements of the New Testament are clear and unambiguous, but of course not objectively true. God just wanted the church of each generation to believe that the parousia *might* come at any moment.
4. Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Matthew*, (Austin, Firm Foundation, 1977) 397
5. Wayne Jackson, *Premillennialism: A System of Infidelity*, (Stockton, Ca., Courier Publications)
6. For a one of the fullest discussions of Biblical time statements to be found anywhere, see my *Who Is This Babylon?* (Don K. Preston, 2712 Mt. Washington Rd. Ardmore, Ok. 73401). I am unaware of any other study that examines so thoroughly the arguments that have been offered to off-set the language of imminence, and the refutation of those arguments.
7. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Prophecy Watch* (Eugene, Ore, Harvest House, 1998) 105+

8. Wayne Jackson, *Christian Courier*, September, 1989, Vol. XXV NO. 5, 3906 East Main, Stockton, Calif. 95215. Incredibly, Jackson condemns the premillennialist for not conceding the imminence of "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" statements. But how can Jackson condemn the premillennialist for doing in regard to the kingdom statements what he does in regard to the coming of the Lord statements?
9. See my tract *How Is This Possible?* For a full discussion of this important text.
10. For a full demonstration that the Great Commission was fulfilled in the first century as Jesus promised, and the meaning of that fulfillment, see my book *Into All the World, Then Comes the End*. See the back cover for more details.
11. John MacArthur, *The Second Coming*, (Wheaton, 111, Crossways Books, 1999)
12. Jackson's entire article, "The Menace of Radical Preterism" is found on his website [www.christiancourier.com](http://www.christiancourier.com) or [www.preteristarchive.com](http://www.preteristarchive.com).
13. From the *Archives* of [www.Christiancourier.com](http://www.Christiancourier.com).
14. Now, Jackson believes that the disciples still had a materialistic view of the kingdom here, and that Jesus corrected them. This is patently erroneous. Jesus had just spent 40 days opening the eyes of the disciples to understand the scriptures (Luke 24), and this was in regard to the kingdom (Acts 1:1 -4). Further, there is not one word said here about the *nature* of the kingdom. The question is one of *chronology*, not the *nature* of its establishment!
15. Wayne Jackson, *Premillennialism*
16. See my booklet *Can You Believe Jesus Said This?* For an in-depth study of Matthew 16:27-28.
17. See my booklet, *How Is This Possible?* For an in-depth study of the nature of the Day of the Lord. Some of the New Testament churches were believing that the Day *had already come* (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Given the traditional concept of the coming of the Lord, how could this be possible?
18. We are currently finishing a book in which we show conclusively that Jesus did not predict to return to earth in his physical body. The belief that the *parousia* of Christ was/is to be the reappearance of his physical body has been a bane on the Christian religion since the inception of that dogma.

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Email: [dkpret@cableone.net](mailto:dkpret@cableone.net) Phone: (580) 226-4876  
 720 N. Commerce #109 Ardmore, Ok. 73401  
[www.eschatology.org](http://www.eschatology.org)

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