

An Air of Expectancy

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We do not see how anyone could objectively read the New Testament documents without sensing it. It seems so pervasive, so prevalent - it truly permeates the entire New Testament canon. There is about it a kind of ubiquitous quality - it is everywhere: in the Gospels...in the book of Acts...in Paul's epistles...in the writings of Peter...in the letters of John, James and Jude...and in the letter to the Hebrews (should you think someone besides Paul might be the author). What we're alluding to is an air of expectancy that hovers over the whole of our New Testament. Whether we call it an "expectation of nearness", "the imminency factor" or give it some other descriptive title, there can be no doubt as to its preponderance. It is there. The New Testament is filled to overflowing with references that depict a first-century church eager with anticipation of end-time events.

Now, before you tune us out and turn us off bear with us for just a bit longer. We are certain that the combination of the sheer volume of time-pregnated references along with the explicitness of these New Testament words and phrases must capture the average student's attention. Surely, at the very least, these Scriptures have raised some questions and promoted some serious thinking.

Just so that you will know that we have not fabricated this "air of expectancy", let us listen to the voice of Scripture. It most definitely is not our desire to encourage a prejudicial reading of God's Word. Quite the contrary, we are eager to let the emphasis of the Bible stand on its own power. The following is only a sampling of what one finds scattered throughout the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation. We have chosen to delete quite a few parallel citations from the synoptic gospels and Paul's epistles. These Scripture quotes are taken from the New American Standard Version; however, any major translation will suffice for your personal research. We would encourage you to read the collective quotes in one sitting and then return to scrutinize the context of each individual quotation.

- *"Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt. 3:2)*
- *the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand (Mk. 1:15)*
- *who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?...the axe is already laid at the root of the trees...His winnowing fork is in his hand (Mt. 3:7, 10, 12)*
- *you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes (Mt. 10:23)*
- *for the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will then recompense every man according to His deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Mt. 16:27-28)*
- *All these things shall come upon this generation (Mt. 23:36)*
- *when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age? (Mt. 24:3)*

- *when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly, I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place (Mt.24:33-34)*
- *Shall not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night and will he delay long over them?...He will bring about justice for them speedily (Lk.18:7-8)*
- *These are the days of vengeance in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled. (Lk.21:22)*
- *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Lk.21:27-28)*
- *When you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near (Lk.21:31)*
- *An hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live (Jn.5:25)*
- *An hour is coming in which all who are in the tomb shall hear His voice (Jn.5:28)*
- *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (Jn. 14:18)*
- *A little while, and you will see Me (Jn. 16:16)*
- *If I want him to remain until I come what is that to you? (Jn.21:23)*
- *Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of the restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time (Acts 3:19-21)*
- *The anxious longing of creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the Sons of God. (Ro.8:19)*
- *Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoptions as sons, the redemption of our body (Rom.8:23)*
- *And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, the day is at hand (Ro. 13:11, 12)*
- *And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet (Ro. 16:20)*
- *You are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor. 1:7-8)*
- *Do not go on passing judgment before the time but wait until the Lord comes (1Cor. 4:5)*
- *The time has been shortened, the form of this world is passing away (1Cor. 7:29,31)*
- *They were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1Cor. 10:11)*
- *you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1Cor. 11:26)*

- *When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away (1Cor. 13:10)*
- *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive...thanks be to God, who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor. 15:22,57)*
- *O Lord come (1Cor. 16:22)*
- *That He might deliver us out of this present evil age (Gal. 1:6)*
- *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary (Gal. 6:9)*
- *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30)*
- *The Lord is near (Phil. 4:5)*
- *To wait for His Son from heaven, who He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come (1Thess. 1:10)*
- *So that He may establish your hearts, unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints (1Thess. 3:13)*
- *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1Thess. 4:17)*
- *You, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief (1Thess. 5:4)*
- *May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass (1Thess. 5:23-24)*
- *In these last days has spoken to us in His Son (Heb. 1:2)*
- *Whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear (Heb. 8:13)*
- *Now, once, at the consummation of the ages...he shall appear...to those who eagerly await Him (Heb. 9:26,28)*
- *Encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:25)*
- *For yet in a very little while He who is coming will come, and will not delay (Heb. 10:37)*
- *You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22)*
- *Be patient, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand...Behold, the Judge is standing right at the door (Js. 5:8,9)*
- *A salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1Pet. 1:5-7)*

- *They shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1Pet.4:5)*
- *The end of all things is at hand (1Pet.4:7) ...It is time for judgment to begin (1Pet.4:17)*
- *After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace...will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you (1Pet.5:10)*
- *The Lord is not slow about His promise (2Pet.3:9)*
- *The world is passing away...It is the last hour...even now antichrists have arisen.(1Jn.2:17,18)*
- *Keep yourselves in the love of God waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 21)*
- *The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show to his bondservants the things which must shortly take place...The time is near...behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:1,3,7)*
- *How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging...rest for a little while (Rev.6:10,11)*
- *There shall be delay no longer (Rev.10:6) ...The hour of Judgment has come (Rev.14:7)*
- *The hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe (Rev.14:15)*
- *In them the wrath of God is finished (Rev.15:1)*
- *It is done (Rev.21:6)*
- *The words are faithful and true... things which must shortly take place (Rev.22:6)*
- *Behold, I am coming quickly (Rev.22:7)*
- *Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near (Rev.22:10)*
- *Come, Lord Jesus (Rev.22:30)."*

After reading such a collection of passages, who can honestly deny that they pulsate with expectancy? And of course we must remember that these documents were written in a first-century setting to first-century saints. For example, it would be poor hermeneutics to make the personal pronouns in Paul's letters refer to us in twentieth-century American. Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, in Corinth, in Galatia, in Ephesus, in Colossi, in Philippi and in Thessalonica. This important fact must be acknowledged and kept every before us as we seek to recover the primary meaning of all New Testament writings.

Not a few students have wrestled with the disharmony that is created by these inspired great (and soon) expectations contrasted with an extremely long and protracted (and according to many, yet future) time for fulfillment. The traditional interpretations of Biblical eschatology has left the church in a period of "eager expectation" for almost two millennia. Berkouwer presents a real challenge in writing, "...we are obligated to deal with the accented nearness of the kingdom found in the New Testament..." (The Return Of Christ).

The considerable discrepancy (imminent expectations versus delayed fulfillment) that emerges when we cling to traditional end-time explanations has planted seeds of doubt in the

hearts of many. If there were and are defects in the eschatological pronouncements of Christ, then He was not all knowing. If He is not inerrant in His teachings, then He is not Lord. Similarly, if the apostles were mistaken in a matter of this consequence, how can we be certain that any one (or all) of them were not mistaken in other doctrinal matters? Surely, all must see that this is a logical and legitimate concern. The manner in which many have dealt with (or better, have not dealt with) this "air of expectancy" has eroded confidence in the Word of God. It has worked to undermine the inspiration and authority of the Bible. This issue must not be perceived as a mere peripheral concern. It strikes at the very heart of the battle for the Bible.

If it is true, that the early (pre-70 A.D.) Christians behaved like an expectant church, eagerly anticipating the consummation of all things in their life time, one must ask why did not the apostles correct such a distorted vision? The fact is the New Testament authors did nothing to dispel or curtail such anticipations. Rather, we find them being the fountainhead of such beliefs. The reason the apostles did not quell such notions was that they originated with the Holy Spirit of truth! The pre-70 A.D. generation was one brimming with great expectations as a direct result of what was taught to them by John the Immerser, Jesus and the New Testament penmen. They lived and labored with an air of expectancy because they were taught: the time was fulfilled, the end was at hand, the judge was at the door, the Lord was near, the world was passing, the Lord was not slow, in a very little while He would come. What we are suggesting in this essay and in this journal is that the A.D.70 event needs to be recognized as the consummation point of Biblical eschatology.