

Does Time Mean Anything to God?

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The fundamental topic of this entire volume is time. It concerns prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments that God gave with a specific time element within them.

In II Pet. 3.3-4, Peter combatted false teachers who denied the return of Christ in the last days when he said:

...in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

Indeed, a number of times Jesus promised to return in his generation (Mt. 24.29, 34). Roughly a generation later, false teachers of the time mocked him by asking, "What happened to that promise? Where is its fulfillment?" In effect, they taunted, "Christ made that promise over thirty years ago and nothing's happened! Everything is going on the same as it always has." Really, this wasn't a substantial argument to assume, "He hasn't come, so he won't." I had just as well say, "My wife said she would come home this afternoon, but it's now 4:30 pm, therefore she isn't coming!"

In years past, when teaching II Peter 3.8, "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," I,

and many others, made the statement that Peter indicated “time means nothing to God”.

However, this statement is overbroad. In some senses, time doesn’t mean much to God; and in others, it is tremendously important.

We realize God’s existence is endless since the Bible speaks of him as the father of eternity. He always has been, now is, and always will be the self-existent one. To God in his eternal view, thirty years is negligible.

While God is not bound by time, he communicates to we who are. When God made prophecies containing a time element, matters of days or years were incredibly significant. Indeed, the very faithfulness of God would be at stake if he made prophecies including time, and then didn’t fulfill them.

God Created Time

In Gen. 1.14, God provided for time, its regulation and management for man, in the creation of heavenly bodies themselves:

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years...”

Hence, though God is timeless, man is not, and God gave man methods of measuring day, night, months, seasons, and the year—all based on movements of heavenly bodies. Interestingly, the week isn’t based on such. The week originated with the creation account in Genesis, when God created everything in six days, then rested on the seventh. Thus, we use God’s creation to measure, make use of, and calculate time intervals. Although God is timeless, man is not, and God importantly uses time to communicate with man.

God Uses Time in Dealing with Man and Expects Man to Respect Time

In Dan. 2.44, Daniel was told, after he described an image composed of gold, silver, bronze, and iron with clay feet (nearly universally recognized as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Roman empires):

...And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed

God didn't say this kingdom was at hand, near, right at the door, or very soon. Of course, to a timeless God, it could have seemed but an instant. However, in man's time, it would be several hundred years before God fulfilled the prophecy.

After the passing of those centuries, John the Baptist came preaching, in Mt. 3.1:

And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand*.

So although Daniel foretold that the kingdom was way off in the future, John taught the opposite. To John and those who heard him, the kingdom was now within reach.

In Mk. 1.14, Jesus preached concerning that same kingdom:

Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, *The time is fulfilled*, and the kingdom of God is *at hand*: repent ye, and believe in the gospel.

Clearly, we see the change in time between Daniel's perspective of the kingdom's coming and that of John the Baptist and Jesus. They preached from a different view because five centuries separated them from Daniel's prediction. God hadn't changed. God's timelessness hadn't changed, but the time element had, and God attached exactly the same importance to both elements of time.

Daniel received a similar example in Dan. 8.6:

And the vision of the evenings and mornings Which has been told is true; But *keep the vision secret*, For it pertains to *many days in the future*."

However, in Rev. 22.10, John heard a different expression of time:

And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand.

Thus, God's prophecies reflect important perspectives of time that demand our careful attention. Often when fulfillment of a proph-

ecy was far off, God says it was. If it was near or present in the future, he gave that information as well. In these prophecies, the time element God gave was extremely important, and in such cases, it's certainly not proper for us to say, "Time means nothing to God."

Another example shows that man isn't to abuse the time element given in such prophecies. For example, in Jer. 29.10 Jeremiah was told to warn the Jews that they would be taken into captivity for seventy years, and then God would bring them out:

For thus says the LORD, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place."

In verse 28, the people realized the time would be "long." Of course, seventy years is no great deal to God who inhabits eternity, to one to whom 1000 years seems as one day. However, to mankind, it represents a lifetime and many died in captivity while others were born in it.

As the time of fulfillment approached for the seventy years, Ezekiel, who preached just before the Babylonian captivity, warned Judah that they were imminently to go into captivity in Ezek. 7.1-9:

Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel, *An end! The end is coming* on the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you, and I shall send My anger against you; I shall judge you according to your ways, and I shall bring all your abominations upon you. For My eye will have no pity on you, nor shall I spare you, but I shall bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the LORD!

Thus says the Lord GOD, A disaster, unique disaster, *behold it is coming!* An end is coming; *the end has come!* It has awakened against you; behold, *it has come!* Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, *the day is near—*tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains. Now I will *shortly* pour out My wrath on you, and spend My anger against you, judge you according to

your ways, and bring on you all your abominations. And My eye will show no pity, nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting.

In spite of these emphatic warnings of imminent judgment, in Ezekiel 11, the rebellious Jews denied that the day of their captivity was really at hand. They predicted things would remain at peace. In Ezek. 11.2-3, God showed the prophet twenty-five men who formed his opposition:

And He said to me, Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city, who say, *Is not the time near* to build houses? This city is the pot and we are the flesh.

Even though Ezekiel repeatedly warned the rebellious Jews that perilous times loomed ahead in captivity, and that it was no time to build up Jerusalem, these fellows preached peace and prosperity. The people foolishly believed it was time to build, and that Jerusalem would protect them like a pot protects food inside it from burning.

In Ezek.12.21ff, Ezekiel told Judah their time was up and the judgment foretold on them was now to be fulfilled:

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, Son of man, what is this proverb you people have concerning the land of Israel, saying, The days are long and every vision fails? Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel. But tell them, *The days draw near* as well as the fulfillment of every vision. For there will no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I the LORD shall speak, and whatever word I speak will be performed. *It will no longer be delayed, for in your days*, O rebellious house, I shall speak the word and perform it, declares the Lord GOD.

Furthermore, the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, The vision that he sees is *for many years*

from now, and he prophesies of times far off. Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed, declares the Lord GOD.

Thus, in spite of the fact God used succinct warnings of imminence in Judah's coming judgment, Ezekiel's opposition, the "prophetic pundits" of his day, appeased the people saying the coming judgment would be delayed, and preached "peace, peace," when not peace, but captivity awaited them. In the end, God's judgments on Judah were fulfilled in the time frame God originally announced. God's attitude toward someone tampering with time elements given in his prophecies was certainly not positive.

Nearly 200 years earlier, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah issued similar imminent warnings to the Northern kingdom about going into Assyrian captivity. In Amos 6.3, Amos warned the rebellious Jews of his time against denying the day of calamity. Likewise, Hosea spoke to the same folks in Hos. 1.4:

...yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

At the same time, Isaiah (in 56.12) combatted false teachers who said:

Come, they say, let us get wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink; And tomorrow will be like today, only more so.

This sounds like the false teachers we noticed at the beginning of this chapter whom Peter addressed in II Peter 3, who ridiculed, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." It also sounds like prophetic pundits today who malign and delay time prophecies in the Bible. This problem is not new; it has existed for centuries. Yet, God has always been concerned about how man views his prophecies involving time.

God Is Faithful in Matters of Time – II Pet. 3.9

Peter, in answering the false teachers of his day, reminded them and us:

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness.

God keeps his promises on time. Dispensational premillennialists (who believe Christ will establish his kingdom when he comes back at a future time) believe God made promises he didn't keep. However, in Dan. 2.44, God showed Daniel in a vision where the kingdom of Christ would be set up during the days of the Roman Empire. Dispensational premillennialists like Hal Lindsey, Charles Ryrie, and Tim LaHaye, co-author of the *Left Behind* series of books, believe God postponed the kingdom because the Jews rejected Jesus. In this contention, they agree with Scofield, author of *Scofield Reference Bible*, who popularized the notion:

The kingdom announced as “at hand” (Mt. 4.17, note) by John the Baptist, by the King, and by the Twelve, was rejected by the Jews, first morally (Mt. 11.20, note), and afterward officially (Mt. 21.42, 43), and the King, crowned with thorns, was crucified....Afterward He announced His purpose to “build” His church. (Dr. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1909, 1945], p. 1226.)

The chapters dealing with *The Faithless Foundation of Dispensational Premillennialism* contain multiple quotations like Scofield's. There, we note that rebellious people did not possess the ability to reject and nullify the true God's plans. In reality, such assertions demonstrate belief in a god who is no better than idols!

In Ps. 2.1-4, David said when the nations attempted to thwart the Messiah's mission, God laughed at them:

Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed; Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords

from us! He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them.

Thus, the Bible presents an entirely different picture of the true God than does dispensational premillennialism. God holds in derision those who treat him like some powerless idol that can't carry out his own plans.

Thus, our God doesn't make time prophecies and then fail to fulfill them. His faithfulness is greater than that.

Conclusion

With these considerations in mind, we need to reflect again on some of the imminence statements made by Jesus and his apostles.

Mt. 16.27-28

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, there are *some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming* in his kingdom.

Mt. 24.29-30, 34

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory....Verily I say unto you, *This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.*

Phil. 3.20, 4.5

...for our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:...The Lord is *at hand.*

Heb. 10.37

For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry.

James 5.5-9

Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one; he doth not resist you. Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord...Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for *the coming of the Lord is at hand*. Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: *behold, the judge standeth before the doors*.

I Pet. 4.5, 7, 17

...who shall give account to him that is *ready to judge the living and the dead*...But the *end of all things is at hand*...For the *time is come for judgment* to begin at the house of God.

I Jn. 2.18

Little children, *it is the last hour*: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that *it is the last hour*.

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.

The remaining chapters discuss these passages in detail as we continue to observe God’s careful use of time in regard to mankind.