

Does the Song of Moses refute Imminence?

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This article appeared in the 2021 Winter issue of *Fulfilled!* Magazine

FUTURISTS KNOW FULL WELL that if the multitudinous temporal indicators of the imminence of the Day of the Lord and the end of the age found in the New Testament are granted their normal meaning, that futurism is falsified. Thus . . .

1. They tell us that God does not think or communicate in time like man does (2 Peter 3:8). Thus, it is claimed that the Bible often uses terms of temporal imminence to speak of events that were actually hundreds of years away.
2. Higher critical scholars tell us that the language of imminence is real, but that Jesus' predictions failed.

As proof for claim #1 we are offered Deuteronomy 4:26f. Robert Shank appealed to Deuteronomy claiming, "Soon, not long' said Moses. But more than seven centuries passed before the fall of Samaria, and eight and a half centuries passed before the dispersal which Moses prophesied found total fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem" (Robert Shank, *Until The Coming of Messiah and His Kingdom*, Springfield, MO, 1982, 390f).

Shank failed to tell his readers that in the previous verse the Lord said, "*When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him.*" In other words, Israel would be in the land a long time. After a long time, they would fall into sin, and *then*, when they sinned: "*You will soon perish from the land.*" Their judgment was not near when Moses wrote because they had not been in the land a long time, they had not had children and grandchildren, and had not gone into sin.

Deuteronomy 32:35-36 is also offered in support of point #1:

Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.

Objectors tell us that since Israel's judgment was centuries away this shows that when God said something was "at hand" it did not mean it was actually near. Let's look closer at Deuteronomy 32.

Take note of Deuteronomy 31:29—the prelude to the Song. Moses said that he knew that after his death, *in the last days*, Israel would become utterly corrupt. What did Jesus—who appeared in the last days—say about Israel filling the measure of her sin? He was clear. It would be in His generation (Matt 23:29f).

In v.5 we read that Moses' Song applied to "the perverse generation." Jesus (Matt 17:17), Peter (Acts 2:40), and Paul (Phil 2), all claim that they were living in that anticipated *crooked and perverse generation*. Taken with Deuteronomy 31:29, this is definitive proof that Moses was not saying that judgment was near when he penned 32:32-35.

In 32:7 we are told that what was predicted in the Song would be rehearsed retrospectively after and over a period of "many generations":

Remember the days of old, Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; Your elders, and they will tell you.

This means that the judgment being predicted was to be fulfilled, at the very least, "*many generations*" later, and was therefore not imminent when Moses delivered the Song.

Twice in this chapter the Song says it is about Israel's last days, her final end:

And He said: 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith. (Deut 32:20)

For they are a nation void of counsel, Nor is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would consider their latter end!

The undeniable, historical fact is that Moses' generation was not the generation of the last days. It was not the generation of Israel's final end. Thus, the final end, and therefore Israel's judgment, was not near. Significantly, *no Old Testament prophet ever said that they were living in the last days*.

This means that in this prophecy *Moses is projected into the last days, which were far off*, after many generations had passed. Jehovah was saying that Israel's judgment would be at hand *in the last days*. The text actually states, "*I will repay them **in due time***" (v.35). It was in that *due time* of Israel's latter end, when they would sin, that "*You will quickly perish out of the land.*"

Significantly, the New Testament writers note that Christ came in “the due time” (Rom 5:6f / Gal 4:4). Thus, in chapter 32, the judgment was not at hand *then*, but would be at hand when Israel sinned when “the due time” arrived.

These prophecies, and there are many others, posit what I have termed *projected imminence*. This is when a prophet is taken by the Spirit to see the events of the last days. The events were imminent in the last days of the vision, but they were not imminent when the prophet recorded his vision.

A look at Daniel and Revelation is illustrative of this. Daniel saw a vision of the last days, the Abomination of Desolation, the Tribulation, the Resurrection, and the end of the age (12:1-9). In verse 9f the prophet was told, “*seal the book for it is for many days to come.*” In other words, fulfillment was far off when Daniel wrote.

However, in Revelation, which reiterates the prophecies of Daniel, John was told: “*Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand*” (Rev 22:10). This temporal contrast cannot be brushed aside or ignored. Events that were 500 years in the future for Daniel (in round numbers), and thus called a long time, in Revelation were said to be *at hand* and *coming quickly* (Rev 22:10-12). In fact, they were so near that the Spirit said, “*let the wicked remain wicked*” (22:11) because the time for repentance was all but up!

The Old Testament prophets clearly knew that the consummation was not for their days. But as illustrated, the Lord said that when the appointed last days arrived, the end would truly be near. Read what YHVH said in Isaiah 60:22, a prophecy of the coming New Creation:

A little one shall become a thousand, And a small one a strong nation. I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.

The Lord says that when the appointed time (*kairos* in the LXX, meaning *the divinely appointed time*) came for the end-time gathering and the New Creation, He would hasten its fulfillment. In light of this, consider the following: Peter anticipated the Day of the Lord to bring the eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3, 5-9). He says the Old Testament prophets predicted that event. *Yet, the Old Testament prophets knew that it was not for their day.* Peter says it was for *his* day. This is what makes the imminence of the New Testament and Revelation all that more impressive. All of the New Testament writers knew they were living in the anticipated last days foretold by the prophets (Matt 13:17 / Acts 2:15f; 3:21-24 / 1 John 2:18). Therefore, their statements of

imminence are all that more urgent. They are not mere statements of hope, or “could be” or “maybe.”

Let me close with this: If at hand means a long time off, what does “not at hand” or “a long time” mean? Repeatedly in the Tanakh, we are told of events that were far off, or after a long time (e.g., Numbers 24, Daniel 10:4-14 / 12:2-10; in the New Testament see Matt 25:14f, etc.). Opponents of Covenant Eschatology appeal to these texts and say that a “long time” truly means a long time, which they identify as—so far—2,000 years. Thus, temporal statements of “a long time” mean just that—a long time! But then, they turn around and tell us that “at hand” statements do not indicate imminence! To say this is radically inconsistent is an understatement.

A quick note: It is sometimes argued that “at hand” in Revelation 1:1-3 / 22:6 / 22:10 refers to spatial nearness, not temporal imminence. This is truly an “*argumentum ad desperatum*,” (argument from desperation—my own invented non-Latin, Latin term). If that is true in Revelation it must be true in Numbers 24:19f where Balaam was told that *the coming of Messiah was not near, not at hand!* Thus, per the “Spatial vs. Temporal” argument, that must mean that the Lord was not spatially near in the days of the book of Numbers!

The undeniable fact is that God can tell time perfectly well, and truthfully. The attempts to negate this are specious, and thus, the Objection is Overruled! For an in-depth discussion of God and Time, see my book, *Who Is This Babylon?*, in which I address and answer every major argument against the objective nature of the biblical time statements. †