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The Doctrine of Imminence

Many signs were given to the nation of Israel, which would precede the second advent, so that the nation might be living in expectancy when the time of His coming should draw nigh. Although Israel could not know the day nor the hour when the Lord will come, yet they can know that their redemption draws nigh through the fulfillment of these signs. To the church no such signs were ever given. The church was told to live in the light of the imminent coming of the Lord to translate them in His presence.

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Ja. 5:8). These passages warn the believer to be watching for the Lord Himself, not for signs that would precede His coming.

The doctrine of imminence, or "at any moment coming" (1 Cor. 15:52), is not a new doctrine, as is sometimes charged. Such a belief in imminency marked the premillennialism of the early church fathers as well as the writers of the New Testament. In this connection Thiessen writes: "They held not only the premillennial view of Christ's coming, but also regarded that coming as imminent. The Lord had taught them to expect His return at any moment, and so they looked for Him to come in their day. Not only so, but they also taught His personal return as being immediately. Only the Alexandrians opposed this truth; but these Fathers also rejected other fundamental doctrines. We may say, therefore, that the early Church lived in the constant

expectation of their Lord, and hence was not interested in the possibility of a tribulation period in the future."

Luther wrote: "I believe that all the signs which are to precede the last days have already appeared. Let us not think that the coming of Christ is far off; let us look up with heads lifted up; let us expect our Redeemer's coming with longing and cheerful mind".

Calvin declared: "Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation for the advent of Christ".

John Knox testified: "The Lord Jesus shall return, and that with expedition."

The doctrine of imminence forbids the participation of the church in any part of the seventieth week (the tribulation). The multitude of signs given to Israel to stir them to expectancy would then also be for the church, and the church could not be looking for Christ until these signs had been fulfilled. The fact that no signs are given to the church, but she rather is commanded to watch for Christ, precludes her participation in the seventieth week.

"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering (immorality) and wantonness (licentiousness), not in strife and envying" (Rom. 13:12,13).