

# HOW SOON IS 'SOON'?

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## Ask the simple question.

For, the term 'soon' is used in different ways. Look carefully at the following sentences and you could find three different meanings. There are several answers to the question we have raised 'How soon is soon?' Let's start with some examples:

The clock maker says, 'This clock will strike soon.'

The astronomer says, 'The eclipse will soon take place.'

The ninety nine year old says 'I will soon be 100.'

The traveller says, 'The taxi will soon be here.'

The mother says to the child, 'You will soon understand.'

The aged grandfather says, 'You will soon inherit my estate.'

The dreamer says. 'Soon my prince will come.'

The Adventist says 'Jesus is coming again soon.'

For the first meaning:

We use the term 'soon' when we can say precisely how many days (months, years or whatever unit) there will be before the expectation is fulfilled.

The 99 year old's expectation is quite specific. She knows how short the time of waiting is for her to reach her one hundredth birthday. Within the limit of 365 days (allowing for a leap year) she can specify how short the time is.

So we specify **Meaning one**

**(1) We know quite exactly, i.e. in exact temporal terms how long it will be.**

For the second meaning:

There is another way in which we could use the term 'soon' intelligently and at the same time claim that there is something we do not know. That would be the exact length of time that will emerge before the predicted event. What happens is that you set a limit and let the limit mark the end point beyond which the event will not be 'soon.' But you do not know exactly how much time it will take within the limit. So 'soon' then means, Within a limit of say ten years, but the time to elapse within that limit is not known. Not more than ten years, but some time within that time span. So there are two aspects of this meaning of 'soon.' You set a limit — say ten years, — but cannot know and therefore cannot say how long 'soon'

will be within that limit. It could be nine days, or nine months or nine years. But so long as it comes within the limit set the word 'soon' is intelligible and verifiable.

So we specify **Meaning two:**

**(2) Any time within a specified limit. We know what the limit is. We do not know when the event will take place within that limit.**

**For the third meaning:**

We would not be very happy if someone said 'Such and such an event will be soon, but we cannot tell at all when it will be. We have no idea when it will take place or how long we have to wait. But it will be 'soon.'

So there is a difference between saying, 'Some day my prince will come' and saying 'My prince will come soon'. But both express the same wishful thinking and have psychological rather than literal significance. This use of the term is not verifiable because there is no literal sense in which we can take it.

So we specify **Meaning three:**

**(3) We set no limit. We don't know at all how soon or how long it will be. So the term becomes *literally* meaningless.**