

# 1. The Theme of Imminent Judgment In the Gospels

© 2018 Samuel G. Dawson

## Introduction

Anyone with familiarity with the New Testament probably knows that it speaks of a judgment of Old Covenant Israel in connection with the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of such a judgment during their ministries in the Gospels. Other New Testament writers, like Paul, Peter, James, and John, also spoke of a coming judgment in their books. Most of this teaching is mistakenly interpreted in our time as a judgment coming on all men at a supposed end of time. It is our purpose in this essay to survey this teaching, developing it in its proper context.

## Brief Old Testament Background of Messianic Judgment from Malachi

In Malachi 3.1-6, we read:

1 Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, *He is coming*, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure *the day of His coming*? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years. 5 *Then I will draw near to you for judgment*; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who

swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts. 6 For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

At the close of the Old Testament, and before 400 years of silence of prophets between the testaments, Malachi foretells the coming of two messengers. In Mal. 3.1, the first, God's messenger, will prepare the way for the Messiah, and the second will be the Messiah himself, the messenger of the covenant. We know this is true, because in Mt. 11.10-12, Jesus quotes this very verse and says it referred to John the Baptist:

10 This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee. 11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In Mal. 4.5 (which we'll discuss further momentarily), the first messenger is called Elijah, whom Jesus identifies as John the Baptist (Mt. 11.11-12, 14 and Mt. 17.12) because he (as Gabriel told John's father Zacharias in Lk. 1.17) came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Speaking of the coming of the Messiah in 3.2, Malachi says,

But who can endure the *day of His coming*? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

Refiner's fire and fuller's soap refer to the cleansing from impurities that Old Covenant Israel will undergo at the Messiah's judgment of the nation. Refining fire is a metallurgical term describing the smelting of impurities from metal. A fuller is one who cleaned and thickened freshly woven (usually woolen) cloth. The process involved cleaning, bleaching, wetting, and beating the fibers to a consistent and desirable condition. Fuller's soap was an alkali made from plant ashes which was used to clean and full new cloth. Since fullers required plenty of running water and the natural substances described, a fuller's field was a place where all were available for the fullers to conduct their profession. In Mal. 3.3, Malachi said:

And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

In v4, Malachi describes the result the Messiah will have on Old Covenant Israel:

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

So, a renewed Israel will be produced. At the same time (v5), God says:

*Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of hosts.*

These words describe God's judgment on those of Israel who will not be refined and cleansed from their impurities.

In Malachi 4.1-6, the prophet continues:

1 For behold, *the day is coming, burning like a furnace*; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and *the day that is coming will set them ablaze*, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet *on the day* which I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts. 4 *Remember the law of Moses My servant*, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of *the great and terrible day of the LORD*. 6 And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of

the children to their fathers, lest I *come and smite the land with a curse.*

Verse 1 describes the day of judgment when the Messiah will purify Israel, as he will harvest the nation, thresh the wheat from the chaff, and set the chaff ablaze. Verse 2 shows that the godly will survive the harvest and refining process, while verse 3 shows the destructive effect that the same judgment process will have on the wicked:

And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet *on the day* which I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts.

That this is to be seen as a Jewish judgment based on the Mosaic law is seen in verse 4:

*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*

Verse 5 speaks of the coming of Elijah (who Jesus identifies as John the Baptist) before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

The result of John's work is seen in verse 6:

And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

Thus, John, the messenger of the Messiah, would prepare Old Covenant Israelites for the Messiah's judgment on the day of the Lord, when the Messiah would smite the land of Israel with a curse, destruction.

To summarize Malachi's prophecy of the Messiah's judgment, we have:

The day of the Lord's coming – 3.2

The day of judgment – 3.5

A day of harvest and smelting – 4.1, 3.2

A judgment of Jews – 4.4

A Great and Terrible Day – 4.5

The Messiah would smite the land with a curse – 4.6

Notice that none of these events occurred during Jesus' earthly ministry. John fulfilled Malachi's prophecies concerning him (as we're about to see), but Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies Malachi made concerning him during his three year ministry. However, we will see that Jesus foretold that these events would be fulfilled during his generation.

## **John the Baptist Fulfills Malachi's Prophecies of Him**

In Mt. 3.1-12, we begin to see the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecies of John the Baptist and Jesus. In verse 5, John, who began preaching about six months before Jesus did, attracting stupendous crowds, for in vv5-7 we read:

5 Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about the Jordan; 6 and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Here John is preaching the message that Malachi foretold, and that Old Covenant Israel needed to hear, a message of repentance, lest they encounter God's wrath that was (lit.) *about to come*. John doesn't speak of wrath way off in the future, but imminently. The imminence is also shown in verse 10, when John says:

And even now *the axe lieth at the root of the trees*: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the *fire*.

John points out to his audience that the harvest isn't far off, as the axe is already at hand, at the root of the fruitless tree of Old Covenant Israel, and their end is to be burned, a fiery, refining judgment which will purify Israel.

Notice the use of "fire" in John's preaching. In v10, it's used of the judgment coming on the Jews. In vv 11-12, John says further concerning this fire:

11 I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in *fire*: 12 whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable *fire*.

Notice in verse 12 that John speaks of the Messiah's imminent harvest of Israel. His winnowing fan is already in his hand, and he's going to burn the chaff of Old Covenant Israel with unquenchable fire, fire that cannot be extinguished, or stopped. Notice that "fire" occurs each of verse 10-12. Many read of the Messiah's baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire to be a blessing, and claim to be fire-baptized. Baptism in the Holy Spirit certainly was a blessing, but baptism in fire was not. Since fire in verses 10 and 12 is speaking of a fiery punishment, undoubtedly baptism in fire in verse 11 was not a blessing, but punishment. Thus, John affirms that the judgment of the Messiah would be a blessing to the godly, but destruction for the ungodly. This is similar to the flood in Noah's day: the same water that destroyed the unrighteous also saved the righteous from earthly destruction. Likewise, when the Roman army besieged Jerusalem in AD 70, their coming provided for the salvation of the righteous Jews (due to their escaping, Mt. 24.16) while the unrighteous who didn't heed Jesus' warning were killed in the tumult.

For now, we merely notice that, as Malachi had foretold, John the Baptist warned of a imminent fiery messianic judgment on Old Covenant Israel.

## **A SIDE TRIP: Deuteronomy 32 the Basis of Malachi's, John's, Jesus', and the Apostles' Teaching**

We now want to notice an extremely important chapter with reference to the Messiah's judgment of Israel, Deuteronomy 32, the Song of Moses. With the aid of several student friends, I've recently come to the conclusion that Deuteronomy 32 may indeed be the most important chapter of the Bible, yet hardly anyone reads it, or appreciates the significance of it. I've taught the Old Testament through five or six times, yet I've missed the importance of this chapter. It's no exaggeration to say that Deuteronomy 32 is the basis of the teachings of the Old Tes-

tament prophets, as well as the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and his apostles throughout the New Testament.

We began our study of God's foretelling of Old Covenant Israel's end from its beginning by noticing a characteristic of the true God as opposed to idols. In Isa. 46.5-7, God compares himself with idols:

5 To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? 6 Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. 7 They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands there. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress.

This is an accurate description of man-made gods. They can't talk, they can't walk, they have to be nailed down so they won't fall over, as they can't stand on their own. In vv9-10, God further says:

9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure;

Notice in particular that the true God is the one who can declare the end of a matter from its beginning. We now want to notice where God declares the end of Old Covenant Israel from its national beginning, particularly in Deuteronomy 32.

Just before Moses' death, after he led the first generation of Jews through the wilderness of Sinai, he brings them to the border of their promised land. In Deuteronomy 28-30, he pronounces all the blessings Israel will receive if they remain faithful to him, and all the curses they will receive if they are unfaithful. In Dt. 31.19-21, God instructs Moses to write a song, the Song of Moses, and teach it to Israel:

19 Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, in order that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. 20 For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their

fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. 21 Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

God tells Moses that this generation of Jews isn't going to turn out good. He is to teach the Song of Moses to Israel, so that when they became unfaithful to him and his judgments began to fall on them, this song and their singing of it would be a witness that God told them how they were going to turn out. Future generations of Jews, including the ones whom Jesus taught, knew this song—they had been taught it since childhood. In Dt. 32.29, Moses told Israel:

29 For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.

Moses tells them that punishments from God will befall them “in the latter days,” i.e., in their future, because of their involvement with false gods. This would include a variety of punishments, including the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. However, in Dt. 32.20-21, Moses becomes much more specific, foretelling the very end of the nation of Old Covenant Israel:

20 Then He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what their *end* [emphasis mine throughout—SGD] shall be; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness. 21 They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

God now foretells “the end” of Old Covenant Israel, that their last generation will be a perverse generation. Jesus, of course, called his generation of Jews an “unbelieving and perverse generation” in Mt.



17.11, and in the first gospel sermon, Peter called faithful Jews to “save yourselves from this perverse generation” (Ac. 2.40).

We can know that the generation of Jesus and Peter is the one under consideration in Deuteronomy 32 since Paul quotes Dt. 32.21 in Rom. 10.19 as justification of his taking the gospel to the Gentiles in an attempt to provoke the Jews to jealousy. This was in the early 60s AD, shortly before the end of Old Covenant Israel in AD 70.

Continuing in Dt. 21.28-29, we read:

28 They are a nation without sense, there is no discernment in them. 29 If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be! (NIV)

Thus, “the end” of Old Covenant Israel was foretold at their beginning in Sinai, verifying that the true God is faithfully called the one who foretells a matter’s end from its beginning, in this case, sixteen centuries before!

## **Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation**

Dt. 32.30-33 gives an important key to interpreting the book of Revelation:

30 How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had given them up? 31 Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this. 32 For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, And from the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of poison, Their clusters, bitter.

It’s interesting that in the Bible, God doesn’t call any city Sodom besides Jerusalem, and it’s surprising how many times she is called by that name. For example, in Isa. 1.9-10, Jerusalem is called Sodom:

9 Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

Likewise, Jer. 23.14 is another example of Jerusalem being referred to as Sodom and Gomorrah:

14 Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

Please see another example in Ezek. 16.47-48.

In Revelation, we find the theme of two cities: Babylon, the great harlot city which is destroyed, and New Jerusalem, which replaces it. One might suspect that Babylon is Old Covenant Jerusalem since New Jerusalem replaces it, but we won't have to rely on suspicion. In Gal. 4.21ff, Paul gives the allegory of Hagar and Sara. These women represented two covenants (the Mosaic Covenant and Christ's new covenant), two peoples (old and new covenant Israel), and two cities (old and new covenant Jerusalem). Hagar represented "the Jerusalem that now is and is in bondage with her children" (v. 25), "but the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (v. 26). This is Paul's version of "the tale of two cities." In Heb. 12.18-23, written to Jewish Christians, the author contrasts two mountains (Sinai and Zion) and two cities (earthly and heavenly or Old and New Covenant Jerusalem). We see the same comparison in Revelation. In Rev. 11.8, we have:

8 And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great (harlot—SGD) city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

If we know where the Lord was crucified, we know the identity of this religious harlot Sodom. It is Old Covenant Jerusalem. Babylon is spoken of again in Rev. 18.24:

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth (ge, lit., land—SGD).

Thus, Revelation has the great harlot, responsible for killing the prophets and saints, as the great city Babylon. Interpreters of Revelation speculate whether Babylon is literal Babylon in Iraq, or Rome. Neither of those cities slew God's prophets, but Old Covenant Jerusalem certainly did. In Lk. 13.33-34, Jesus said:

33 Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not!

Thus, in Revelation, Jerusalem was the harlot city that killed the prophets, and where Jesus was crucified.

## **Back to Deuteronomy 32**

We conclude our side trip into Deuteronomy 32 and Revelation and return to our discussion of Deuteronomy 32. In Dt. 32.34-36, we have Moses speaking of God's vengeance on Israel:

Is it not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up in My treasuries? Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot (Old Covenant Israel—SGD) will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them. For the LORD will vindicate His people (the faithful of Old Covenant Israel—SGD), And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

Notice that vengeance and vindication will take place at the same time. Both groups of people will see the same event, the end of Old Covenant Israel (at the hands of the Romans in AD 70) and interpret it entirely differently. The wicked see cruel destruction; the righteous see their salvation from the wicked. This is not unique to their judgment. In the flood of Noah's time, the wicked and righteous again saw the same event entirely differently. The wicked saw its destruction, while the same flood was the salvation of the righteous as the same water that destroyed the wicked carried the righteous to a new world order after the flood. This passage is alluded to in Hebrews 10:30-31 to describe a first century judgment of Old Covenant Israel.

Jesus speaks of this same vengeance of God on Old Covenant Israel in Lk. 21.20-24, when he says:

But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath unto this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

“All things that are written may be fulfilled” would certainly include the prophecy of God’s vengeance on Old Covenant Israel, as well as the vindication of the righteous and the taking of the gospel to the Gentiles.

## **Further Indications of Imminent Judgment in the Gospels**

### **Lk. 11.45-51**

In this passage, Jesus has just confronted some Jews for their traditions, and one of their lawyers took umbrage, perhaps thinking Jesus would back off his accusation:

45 And one of the lawyers answering saith unto him, Teacher, in saying this thou reproachest us also. 46 And he said, Woe unto you lawyers also! for ye load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe unto you! for ye build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 So ye are witnesses and consent unto the works of your fathers: for they killed them, and ye build their tombs. 49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send unto them prophets and apostles; and some of them they shall kill and persecute; 50 that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may

be required of this generation; 51 from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary: yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.

In verse 48, Jesus shows that since these Jews consented with their ancestors' treatment of the prophets, they were actually in fellowship with their evil deeds! Consenting with evil constitutes fellowship with it. Paul, in Rom. 1.32, affirms that even Gentiles were held responsible for such sinful consenting with evildoers, and these were people who didn't even know of God or his revealed will. How much more responsible were God's covenant people for such fellowship with sin. Because of this, Jesus' audience ("this generation") was going to be held responsible for the victims of their wicked ancestors. Later on, in our discussion of Mt. 23.33-36, we'll see that they would be judged *in* their own generation.

### **Lk. 12.49-56**

This passage foretells a coming judgment on this generation of Jews in their present time.

49 I came to cast fire upon the earth [lit., land—SGD]; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? 50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! 51 Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: 52 for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. 53 They shall be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law. 54 And he said to the multitudes also, When ye see a cloud rising in the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it cometh to pass. 55 And when (ye see) a south wind blowing, ye say, There will be a scorching heat; and it cometh to pass. 56 Ye hypocrites, ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret *this time* [emphasis mine—SGD]?

Malachi had foretold that the Messiah would bring a curse upon the land of Israel (4.6). Here Jesus specifies that the curse he will bring on the land will be fiery. He then upbraids them for being able to forecast rainy weather, and heat spells, but that they can't see what's to happen to them *in their own time*, implying that his judgment on the isn't a long way off, and certainly not at the end of time, but in their own present time!

### Lk. 13.3

In this passage, Jesus again warns of impending judgment on the Jews:

1 Now there were some present at that very season who told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered and said unto them, Think ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they have suffered these things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Many religious folks believe that great suffering on the part of God's people is an indicator of great sin. Job's three friends, when they heard of his suffering, suspected that Job was a great sinner, although God had said in Job 1 that he was an upright man. However, since Job's friends thought that his great suffering indicated that he was a great sinner, when they came to encourage him, could not because they didn't want to be endorsing his sin. The Jews in Jesus' audience evidently thought the same way, as Jesus questions why they thought some Galileans that Pilate had killed, or others who had suffered at the collapse of a tower were terrible sinners. He then denied that they were worse sinners than the Jews to whom he spoke, and asserted that unless they repented, they would suffer similar destruction. They would be judged shortly in the end of Old Covenant Israel, foretold by Moses, Malachi, John the Baptist, and now by the Messiah himself.

With absolutely no regard for the context, this passage has often been used to teach people who would become Christians to repent. Jesus wasn't telling them what to do to become Christians, for there were

none yet, and he certainly wasn't giving instruction for us to use to evangelize the lost.

### **Lk. 13.6-9**

6 And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. 7 And he said unto the vine-dresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground? 8 And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9 and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.

The author, raised in the Texas panhandle where trees are so scarce that there hardly is one that wasn't planted by a white man, treasured any tree that could give shade from the Texas heat. Our lord isn't that desperate. He expected fruit from his trees, and deemed worthless those that are fruitless. In the Old Testament, he had depicted Israel as his choice tree, from which he expected fruit. This parable depicts Old Covenant Israel as his tree, from which he had expected fruit, but found none. Jesus' parable teaches that if Israel didn't finally produce the fruit of righteousness, it would be destroyed, as a warning of upcoming judgment on their nation.

### **Mt. 13.24-30, 36-42 – Parable of the Tares**

24 Another parable set he before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: 25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27 And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it tares? 28 And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the

tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

This harvest is the same theme foreseen by Malachi and John the Baptist. The imminence of it comes in Jesus' teaching when his disciples ask him further about this parable in vv. 36-42:

36 Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 37 And he answered and said, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 38 and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy that sowed them is the devil: and *the harvest is the end of the world* [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD]; and the reapers are angels. 40 As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD]. 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, 42 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Jesus says that the harvest he's speaking of will be at the end of the age, not the end of time nor the end of the planet. The Jews to whom he spoke recognized two ages (and Jews still do): the age in which they lived, the Mosaic age, and the Messiah's age. Jews who don't recognize Jesus as the Messiah believe they are still in the Mosaic age, and when the Messiah comes, his age will began.

Jesus respected the Jewish usage of these terms in Mt. 12.31-32 when he said:

31 Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] nor in that which is to come.



“This age” would be the Mosaic age; Jesus says that blaspheming the Holy Spirit wouldn’t be forgiven in the Mosaic age, nor in the age to come, the Messianic (or Christian) age.

Likewise, in Lk. 20.27-35, when responding to the question from the Sadducees concerning marriage in the resurrection, Jesus used this same distinction:

27 And there came to him certain of the Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection; 28 and they asked him, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote unto us, that if a man’s brother die, having a wife, and he be childless, his brother should take the wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second: 31 and the third took her; and likewise the seven also left no children, and died. 32 Afterward the woman also died. 33 In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them shall she be? for the seven had her to wife. 34 And Jesus said unto them, The sons of this world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] marry, and are given in marriage: 35 but they that are accounted worthy to attain that world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD], and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:

In the Mosaic age, in which every character in this conversation lived, citizens of the kingdom were produced by marriage and procreation. In the case of the woman involved, she had no children after five marriages. This was of utmost seriousness in the Mosaic age, as children of the kingdom were produced solely by physical procreation. Eunuchs, for example, could produce no heirs in the kingdom, and they were regarded as inferior citizens because of this.

However, Jesus says, that won’t be the case in the Messiah’s age. Children of God will not be produced by physical procreation, but by teaching the gospel. Now, in the Messiah’s age, we know that to be the case. Christians are produced by evangelism, not procreation. Imagine the effect this teaching would have on eunuchs (such as the Ethiopian in Acts 8) or unmarried people now: they can produce citizens and heirs of God’s kingdom as well as anyone else!

## The Age of Christ Has no End

We next notice that the Messianic age has no end. In the Messianic prophecy of Isa. 9.6, 7, God foretold:

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be *no end to the increase of His government or of peace*, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

This prophecy of the Messiah also says that there will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace. The increase of the Messiah's government takes place, again, through preaching the gospel, and it has no end.

Similarly in Lk. 1.28-33, we find the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary, saying:

28 And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. 31 And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and *of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Again, the kingdom of the Messiah will never end. One had just as well talk about the end of eternity as the end of the Messiah's rule. It will never end!

Hence, the Age of Christ or the Messiah's age has no end. The Mosaic age did. The Messiah's age has no last days, last day, nor last hour. The Mosaic age had all of those, and they are spoken of repeatedly. Thus, when these parables speak of the end of the age, they're not speaking of the end of the Christian age, which has no end, but the end

of the Mosaic age, the age in which Jesus' audience lived. The harvest and judgment of which Jesus spoke to his countrymen would occur at the end of the Mosaic age.

### **Mt. 13.47-50 – Parable of the Net**

We see this same teaching in the parable of the net in Mt. 13.47-50:

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: 48 which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. 49 So shall it be in the end of the world [*aionios*, lit., age—SGD] the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Here again Jesus speaks of a judgment between good and bad in God's kingdom at the end of the age, with the bad to be cast away in a fiery destruction. This is precisely what is going to happen to the unbelievers in Old Covenant Israel.

### **Mk. 9.1, Mt. 16.27-28**

In Mk. 9.1, Jesus says concerning his kingdom:

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power.

This is a verse frequently and comfortably used in churches of Christ of the author's background. It shows that the kingdom of Christ was coming during the lifetimes of those in his Jewish audience. Did that happen, or do we have some mighty old disciples around? Or, was Jesus mistaken, a false prophet? We're comfortable emphasizing that if the Messiah's kingdom didn't happen during his disciples' lifetimes, then Jesus was a false prophet, and he deserved to be put to death according to the Mosaic Law under which he lived. In short, we're extremely confident in our use of this verse.

Are we as comfortable with its parallel in Matthew? In Mt. 16.27-28, Jesus said:

27 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. 28 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.

Here, Jesus says he would come in the glory of his father with the angels while some of his disciples were still alive, and that he would judge, rendering to every man according to his deeds in the same time frame.

Did this happen? Or do we have some awfully old disciples around? Or, was Jesus mistaken, a false prophet? Are we as confident that if this wasn't fulfilled as Jesus said, that he was a false prophet, justifying his crucifixion? If this wasn't fulfilled, Jesus was a false prophet, no better than the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, and deserved to be put to death.

"But wait," someone will say, "that was speaking of the transfiguration, the next event we read of in Matthew 17." Yet there's no marvel that some of Jesus' disciples would still remain alive after only 6 days (Mt. 17.1). Also, there was no element of judgment in the Transfiguration, or at Pentecost, where most believe that Mk. 9.1 was fulfilled.

No, this is the same coming in judgment we began with in Malachi, of which John the Baptist warned, and which Jesus foretold in terms of imminence. Not at the "end of time," nor at the "end of the planet," but at the end of the Mosaic age.

Jesus said that he would come in the glory of his father, that is, the glory that his father had come with many times in the Old Testament, though the father had never come physically, nor bodily. For example, in Isa. 19.1 we read:

The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

Here is God coming on a cloud down to Egypt, not speaking of God coming physically, bodily, or geographically to Egypt, but through his instruments Assyria and Babylon.

We see a similar example in Jer. 4.13, where Jeremiah warns of God's coming in judgment on Judah using Babylon's horses:

Behold, he goes up like clouds, And his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles Woe to us, for we are ruined!"

In Mic. 1.3, 6 we see a similar example of God coming against Samaria:

3 For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth 6 For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country,

Jesus affirmed that he would be coming in the same way his father had come, in glory, on clouds of judgment, on Old Covenant Israel.

## **Mt. 21.33-45 – Parable of the Vineyard**

33 Hear another parable: There was a man that was a householder, who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. 34 And when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner. 37 But afterward he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. 39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, The same was made the head of the

corner; This was from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust. 45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, *they perceived that he spake of them* [emphasis mine—SGD].

He spake of them, not just anyone, not us, not just theoretical teaching, but he spake of them. They had killed the prophets. They were going to kill the son, Jesus himself. They will be miserably destroyed and the vineyard will be given to others, Gentiles.

### **Mt. 22.1-14 – Parable of the Wedding Feast**

And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 *But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.* 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was

speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

Notice that after the king vented his wrath and destroyed their city, he went right on with the wedding. This is what we see in Revelation 18-19. Chapter 18 describes the destruction of the harlot city, Old Covenant Jerusalem (Rev. 11.8 – where their Lord was crucified), and chapter 19 proceeds with the wedding feast.

### **Mt. 23.29-36**

In Mt. 23.29-36, Jesus prosecutes the case against Old Covenant Jerusalem for killing the prophets, and foretells her imminent punishment in his generation:

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, 30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell? 34 Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: 35 that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.*

Note in particular “these things” and “this generation.” Both these terms will figure significantly in our interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, to which we now proceed.

This essay is excerpted from *Revelation Realized: Martyr Vindication from Genesis to Revelation* by Samuel G. Dawson, available from Amazon.com