

3. The Theme of Imminent Judgment After the Gospels

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The two previous chapters have traced the thread of imminent Messianic judgment through the gospels to the climax of that judgment in the Olivet Discourse, respectively. In this chapter, we now want to trace the same thread through the New Testament books after the gospels. As in that previous chapter, this study will not be exhaustive, but should give the reader this significant theme in the rest of the New Testament.

Acts 2

Although we have discussed Peter's quotation of Joel 2.28-32 in Acts 2 extensively in our material on Matthew 25, we discuss it briefly here as it occurred after the gospel accounts. Again, Peter affirmed that the disciples on Pentecost were not drunken as charged, but that what was occurring was what Joel foretold happening in "the last days." As he further quotes Joel, he uses language that was common to the Olivet Discourse, discussed in the previous chapter. Although Peter stops quoting at Joel 2.32a, as we saw in the previous chapter, Joel said in Joel 2.32b that the judgment he foretold was escapable, as Jesus himself instructed his disciples to "flee to the mountains" in Mt. 24.15-16, and as history records that they did. Joel, and Peter's quotation of him in Ac. 2.20, spoke of "the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord," when this judgment would take place, and warned his guilt-struck listeners to "save yourselves from this wicked generation," by escaping when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem. Of course, as we've seen, Jesus foretold Jerusalem's judgment and destruction in his generation.

Ac. 24.25

In this text, we have Paul's encounter with the Roman governor of Judea, Felix, which probably took place shortly before 60 AD:

And as he reasoned of righteousness, and self-control,
and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified

Paul's warning about the judgment to come was literally, the judgment “about” to come [Gr. *krimatos tou mellontos*—SGD]. Various lexicons affirm that *mello* with the infinitive is the strongest indication of imminence in the Greek language. Hence, this passage certainly falls within our search for passages indicating imminent judgment in the first century. As politicians are always desirous of national stability, Felix was certainly terrified of such a catastrophe, as would any politician of our day.

Heb. 6.4-8

In this passage, we find the Hebrews writer (probably in the first quarter of the 60s AD) giving a blunt warning to his Jewish listeners who, because of persecution, are contemplating abandoning the way of Christ and returning to Judaism:

4 For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age [lit., “about”—SGD] to come, 6 and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Now notice how he characterizes the judgment that's about to come to them if they don't repent:

7 For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: 8 but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned.

Isn't this the same warning of fiery judgment for unfruitfulness that was given by Malachi (that would occur at the day of the Lord), John the Baptist (“the axe lieth at the root of the tree,” and the judge's “winnowing fan is in his hand”), and Jesus himself (“while some of you are still alive,” Mt. 16.27-28, and “this generation,” Mt. 24.29, 34)? Obviously, it is.

Heb. 10.24-39

We now notice a passage used nearly universally to admonish Christians for not attending every service of their local church. While the problem the Hebrews author addresses may certainly include an abandonment of collective religious service, I believe we'll see it is so much more significant than that.

We first consider Heb 10.24-25:

24 and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.

Notice the three times the author says, "let us" to his readers: "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith" (v22); and "let us hold fast the confession of our hope"(v23). Both of these are in contrast to shrinking back out of regard to the persecution they were suffering from their Jewish countrymen. Then in v24 he says, "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together."

Usually, this assembling is taken to be the weekly local assemblies. This assembling could certainly include those local assemblies, but as we'll see, this position drastically shortchanges the teaching of this passage.

The word for assembling here is *episynagogue*, an emphatic form of *synagogue*, an assembling. It is generally translated "gathering." The gathering of Jews scattered by the various captivities of Old Covenant Israel, along with Gentile Christians now obeying the gospel in the New Covenant age was an important theme in Messianic prophecy. In Isa. 11.9-12, a passage quoted by Paul in Rom. 15.12 as fulfilled in his taking the gospel to Gentiles in his missionary journeys. Isaiah foretold the gathering of Gentiles and Jews by the Messiah in the *last days* of the Mosaic age. Likewise, in Isa. 49. 5-7, and 56.6-8, Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would gather Old Covenant Israelites.

In Hos. 1.10-11, Hosea foretold that the sons of Israel would be gathered together by the Messiah, as is evidenced by quotations of these passages as fulfilled in I Pet. 2.10 and Rom. 9.24, 26. In Jn. 11.47-52, the leaders of the Jews, confronted by Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, reasoned:

47 The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. 49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51 Now this he said not of himself: but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; 52 and not for the nation only, but *that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.*

This “gathering” of scattered Jews, some of whom had become Gentiles, was much more significant than weekly assemblies some think are the topic in Heb. 10.24-25. This was the gathering that the prophets foretold that the Messiah would accomplish in Israel's last days. This is the very gathering that Jesus stated he wanted to accomplish in Mt. 23.37:

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 chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Yet the Jews in the main wouldn't have it. Again, in Mt. 24.31, Jesus said:

And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall *gather together his elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This gathering was not assemblies of local congregations of Christians, but the Messianic gathering of Jews and Gentiles into the one body of Christ.

This is the great assembling (a singular assembling, not weekly assemblies) the Hebrew Christians were in danger of abandoning in Heb. 10.25. When the Hebrews author spoke of forsaking this assembling, he said they were doing it “as ye see *the day* drawing near.” Popularly,

“the day” is taken to be the first day of the week, Does the first day of the week fit the author's exhortation to do so “so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh? Do any of us exhort each other more on Fridays than we do on Tuesdays? Have we ever even conceived of it? There's a much greater day in the context:

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries.

It's evident that “the day” the Hebrews author refers to is a day having *a certain fearful expectation of judgment*; it's a day where a *fierceness of fire shall devour the adversaries*, i.e., unbelieving Jews. Why wouldn't it be the day of the Lord of Malachi 3.4, the “great and terrible day of the Lord” foretold by Joel and quoted by Peter in Ac. 2.20? Why wouldn't it be “the great day of God, the Almighty” of Rev. 16.15 against the harlot city (v19), “wherein their Lord was crucified” (11.8), Old Covenant Jerusalem, the head of “the perverse generation” of Ac. 2.40?

The author of Hebrews continues:

28 A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: 29 of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

One who abandons weekly assemblies doesn't necessarily at all count the blood of the covenant as unholy, nor does he despise the Holy Spirit. However, the Jewish Christians addressed in Hebrews contemplated avoiding persecution were doing those very things!

Moreover, in vv. 30-31, the author of Hebrews says:

30 For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It is particularly interesting that v30 is quoted directly only from Dt. 32.35, and v31 is quoted only from Dt. 32.36. This is significant because Deuteronomy 32, the song of Moses, deals with the final end of Old Covenant Israel, as we saw in the chapter on imminent judgment in the gospels!

As a matter of fact, consider Dt. 32.34-36, and notice the similarity of that passage with our current text:

35 Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For *the day of their calamity is near*, And the impending things are hastening upon them. 36 For the LORD will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free.

This “day of calamity” is “the day” the Christians in Hebrews could see approaching. It was the day when the righteous would be vindicated and the ungodly would be destroyed. This is also the context of Heb. 10.37, our present text:

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

Certainly the Hebrews author is speaking of then imminent coming of the Messiah, the coming spoken of by Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself in Mt. 16.27-28 (in the lifetime of some of his disciples), and Mt. 24.30, 34 (in his generation). Surely Jesus did come in judgment on Jerusalem in literally a very very little while (*mikron hoson hoson*), and wasn't speaking of a coming still future to us. That would be over 2000 years of tarrying!

In conclusion on this passage, the author is speaking of persecuted Jewish Christians on the verge of abandoning the way of Christ with his last days Messianic gathering of Jews and Gentiles foretold by the prophets as the great day of the Lord (spoken of by Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus) was just on the horizon, probably less than five years away.

Jas. 5.1-9

Now notice James' warnings to Jewish Christians of his time, these words being written about 60 AD:

1 Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh *as fire*. Ye have laid up your treasure *in the last days*.

The Jewish abuse of riches is a prevalent theme of Jesus' dealings with the Jews, the entire chapter of Luke 16 dealing with the subject. Notice the time reference when they would receive fiery punishment for their misuse of money in the last days, i.e., as we've seen, the last days of the Mosaic age.

In vv4-5, James continues:

4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [hosts—SGD]. 5 Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; ye have nourished your hearts in a *day of slaughter*.

What do you suppose this fiery last days “day of slaughter” is, if not for the coming judgment foretold by Malachi (who spoke of the Messiah judging Israel as a *refiner's fire*), John the Baptist (who said he would separate the wheat from the chaff, burning the chaff with *unquenchable fire*), and Jesus (who said he came to *bring fire on the land*)?

In vv6-9, James concludes:

6 Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one; he doth not resist you. 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, *until the coming of the Lord*. Behold, *the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth*, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: *for the coming of the Lord is at hand*. 9 Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, *the judge standeth before the doors*.

Still speaking of imminent judgment coming on these Jews, James speaking of Christ's at-hand coming, which Jesus said would occur during the lifetime of his disciples, and in his generation. He invokes the figure of harvest and destruction for unfruitfulness, spoken of by

Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus, and said the judge was standing before the door—an imminent judgment. To those who think this judgment hasn't yet taken place we ask, “Just how long do you think Christ has to stand at the door? Couldn't he at least have a seat and put his fan down for a little while after standing there holding it for two thousand years?”

I Peter 4.5, 7

Another indication of imminent judgment in the rest of the New Testament is found in this passage, where Peter refers to Christians...

5 who shall give account to him that is *ready to judge* the living and the dead...7 But *the end of all things is at hand*: be ye therefore of sound mind, and be sober unto prayer:

Peter says Jesus is ready to judge these Christians. This is parallel to James saying that the judge is about to judge, and he's standing at the door. It's also parallel to Jesus' statement in Lk. 21.20-22, where in connection with the Roman siege of Jerusalem, he said:

20 But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. 21 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. 22 *For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

Thus, when Peter speaks of “the end of all things” being at hand, again, this is not a prophecy of a judgment still not having taken place more than 2000 years later, but one on the verge of taking place in their first century time.

I Peter 4.17-18

Peter says the same thing in I Pet. 4.17-18:

For the *time is come for judgment* to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the

righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

Again, Peter is speaking of a judgment not way off down yonder at the end of time, but one which was on their very doorstep in the mid to late sixties AD. Peter affirms that the imminent judgment will involve both the righteous and the ungodly; all were going through the great tribulation.

When Peter says that the righteous will scarcely be saved, he's not saying that God just barely gives enough grace to enable the righteous to squeak into heaven. This statement is equivalent to what Jesus said about the same judgment in Mt. 24.22:

And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

II Peter 2.9

the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment;

Peter's instruction concerning the approaching judgment from the previous passage is undoubtedly the same judgment he speaks of here, the one the time had come for. It was also the one Malachi had warned of in chapters 3-4, the one John the Baptist had warned about in Mt. 3.11, and Jesus taught concerning in Matthew 24-25. As Peter taught here that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly, so it was during the days of Noah, the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, and at the destruction of Jerusalem, when the watchful could see the sign Jesus gave his disciples, and could escape by fleeing to the mountains.

I Jn. 2.18

John cites the same scheme in this passage.

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*.

Obviously, the last hour of the physical universe, or the last hour of time itself, wasn't the thing John was teaching. Nor was he teaching

the last hour of the last day of the last days of the endless age of Christ (as we've seen “no end” in Isa. 9.6 and Lk. 1.33). However, the Mosaic age had all of these: last days, a last day, and a last hour, and John exhorts his readers that the time is upon them.

Revelation 1.1-3

John also speaks of imminent judgment in this book. We begin by considering John's statements of the time element of the book in Rev. 1.1-3:

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things *which must shortly come to pass*: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; 2 who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for *the time is at hand*.

A major theme of this book is the imminent judgment of a harlot city, spiritually called Sodom and Egypt (11.8), wherein their Lord was crucified. After it's destruction in chapter 18, the harlot city was replaced in chapter 21.2, 10 by New Jerusalem, which is spoken of as the holy city. This replacement of the harlot city by the holy city, New Jerusalem, would, for no other reason, make us strongly suspicious that the old harlot city was Old Covenant Jerusalem. The evidence is compounded by John's statement that the harlot city is where the Lord was crucified, again, Old Covenant Jerusalem. The popular view that Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century cannot be made to fit an imminent destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of the city “wherein their lord was crucified” was absolutely not imminent!

Thus, Revelation was written shortly before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, and when the fulfillment of prophecies concerning it's judgment were at hand. Thus, the time element for its Revelation's writing and Jerusalem's destruction were synchronous with John the Baptist and Jesus' pronunciations of judgment upon her—in their generation, the first century AD.

Revelation 1.7

John also gives this piece of evidence at the beginning of his book:

Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him.

This statement about Jesus coming with the clouds, we've seen foretold in Mt. 16.27-28 to occur in the lifetime of some of his disciples, and in Mt. 24.29, 34, in his generation. Jesus said he would come "in the glory of the father," that is, as the father had come in the Old Testament. The father had come in glory many times, yet never physically. He came through the agency of nations he used to carry out his judgments on the wicked.

This verse is based on a prophecy in Zech. 12.10, which said:

And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that *they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.*

Continuing on into Zechariah 13, the prophet continues:

In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.

"In that day" in 13.1 is at the same time as 12.10, in the first century, the time when Jesus was crucified, and the fountain (of blood) was opened for sin and for impurity. In other words, the at-hand and shortly-to-come-to-pass coming of Revelation was in the generation before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Revelation 22.6, 10, 12

At the conclusion of Revelation, John gives more evidence of the imminence of Christ's coming and judgment.

6 And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the proph-

ets, sent his angels to show unto his servants *the things which must shortly come to pass*¹⁰ And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for *the time is at hand* ¹² Behold, *I come quickly*; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.

Thus, not only does John frame the coming and judgment of his book in his first-century time frame, but he closes the book in the same way. Of course, Jesus' statements that he is coming for judgment in the first century is the same as his teaching in Mt. 16.27-28 that he was coming in glory for judgment during the lifetime of some of his disciples, as well as Mt. 25.31-46 that he was coming in glory for judgment in the last days of the Mosaic age, as we saw in the previous chapter of this work.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes our three chapter study on the imminent coming and judgment of Christ *in the gospels*, climaxing with the Olivet Discourse, and the imminent coming and judgment of Christ *after the gospels*.

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