

A LOCAL JUDGMENT?

By Don K. Preston

A prominent brother, in a series of tapes in which he attempts to refute realized eschatology, argues that the destruction of Jerusalem was a localized judgment whereas the final judgment and coming of Jesus will be universal. He concludes therefore that the fall of Judaism cannot be the time of the Parousia. Since this is a common objection we feel it deserves some attention.

We feel this argument ignores specific Bible statements and fails to grasp the significance of Jerusalem's demise.

The basis of the argument cited above is found in Matthew 11:20ff; 12:41-42 and in Acts 17:30-31. In Matthew Jesus speaks of those of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh, and the Queen of Sheba all rising against the recalcitrant generation which witnessed Jesus' works and refused to repent. Now since all these people/cities had long since perished but would be with that generation in judgment to condemn it; and since this can only be the resurrection, it is argued, it therefore follows that this can only be the end of time and the universal judgment. This, we are assured, had nothing to do with the destruction of Jerusalem.

The contention is similar on Acts 17. Paul said Jesus was going to judge the world. We are told the Athenians (and others) knew nothing of the destruction of Jerusalem and could not have cared less. Strangely, this very argument is offered by millennialists to prove that Matthew 24 does not discuss the destruction of Jerusalem but is discussing the so-called Great Tribulation. If, however, the fact that most of the world did not know of an event, and would not have cared anyway, proves it to be of limited value, then one could well argue that the crucifixion was of little value. Even fewer people knew of it than did about the destruction of Jerusalem!

Was the destruction of Jerusalem a localized event? Is it a valid objection to Preterism to contend that Judgment and the coming of Jesus will be universal while Judaism's demise was an event "long, long ago, in a country far, far away"?

A Closer Look

First, one must realize that to the Jews the destruction of their capital was anything but a localized event. The implications of the fall were cosmic and eternal. Jerusalem was to them the center of the world and the temple the center of the center. As long as the city stood and was at peace the Jew could assume all was well with creation and his relationship with his God, Psalms 41:11. But if the city fell, the Jew knew his relationship with God had been severed, cf. Lamentations.

Jesus, in predicting the fall said the message of its impending demise would be preached "in all the world as a witness to all the nations", Matthew 24:14. Now if it were to be a strictly local event why would it be preached about in Athens, Rome, Corinth, etc.?

Further, when Jesus used the word "world" in Matthew to speak of the extent of the message he used the word "oikoumene". It means the inhabited world. See Vines, Thayer's, etc.. Interestingly, when Paul stood on Mars hill and told of coming judgment he said God "will judge the world in righteousness"; and he used the very same word world as did Jesus in Matthew 24:14. Now can we not see that in Acts 17:31 Paul said God was going to judge the same "world" to which the message of Jerusalem's fall was to be spoken? It was the inhabited world. Now watch.

Luke 21 is a passage concerned exclusively with Jerusalem's fate, cf. verses

5-7. In verse 25 Jesus describes the fall and says there would be "upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity...men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking for those things which are coming on the earth". Take note of the fact please that Jesus said men's hearts would fail them because of the things coming on the "earth". The original word used here is the identical word as used in Matthew 24:14, and Acts 17:31! Jesus emphatically declares here that the same world which would hear the warnings of judgment, Matthew 24, the same world that would be judged in Acts 17, this same world would be in great distress at the time of Jerusalem's fall. In Revelation 3:10 this same word is used when Jesus promised to keep the church of Philadelphia "from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole world". This is emphatically placed in the context of Jesus' imminent coming, vs 11.

Now how can we believe Jerusalem's fall was a local event in the face of all this? But this is not nearly all.

Imminent, Universal Judgment

To argue that the judgment could not have been at Jerusalem's fall ignores several emphatic passages which placed judgment in that first century generation context.

In Matthew 16:27-28 Jesus said he would come with his angels, in glory, reward every man according to his works, and some standing there at the time he spoke those words would not die until they saw him coming. It is at best a questionable hermeneutic that arbitrarily divides verses 27-28; but this is exactly what most commentators do. There is no contextual basis for this however. The reader will notice that we have here the coming of the Lord. It is the coming to judge "every man"! And it would happen before that generation would pass away. Full corroboration of this is to be found in Revelation 22:12 where Jesus said: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be". Jesus quotes his own promise in Matthew 16 and states in no uncertain terms that his coming to judge was at hand. The reader will also observe that this is the judgment of every man. It is therefore the "universal judgment" but it was imminent when John wrote!

Peter also believed that the judgment was at hand. He said Jesus was "ready to judge the living and the dead", 4:5. He insisted "the end of all things is at hand", 4:7; and stated "the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God", 4:17. Surely the judgment of the "living and the dead" and the "end of all things" qualifies as "universal judgment". This being true, how can the imminence of the passage be ignored/denied?

James also believed judgment to be imminent. In James 5:7-9 he urged his readers to be patient "until the coming of the Lord"; he promised them "the coming of the Lord is at hand"; and said "the Judge stands at the door".

We could continue at length but have sufficiently demonstrated that the New Testament writers believed the judgment of all was at hand. But there is still more to be considered.

Back To Creation

The contention, based on the Matthean texts cited above, that the dead of former ages could not have been judged at the time of Jerusalem's fall is fully dashed on the solid rock of Jesus' emphatic statements.

In Matthew 23:29-39 Jesus condemned the Jews and their city. He declared that upon them would come "all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you slew between the temple and the altar." IT IS A TRAGIC OVERSIGHT TO SEE IN THE FALL OF JERUSALEM A STRICTLY JEWISH JUDGMENT! There were no Jews in Abel's day! Yet the blood of Abel would be vindicated by judgment! At Jerusalem's fall the blood of the saints shed through the ages, all the way back to creation was to be vindicated and judged. Compare Luke 18:1-8, Hebrews 11; Revelations

6:9ff.

Would this judgment be "universal" enough to include those of Sodom; of Tyre and Sidon?; of Nineveh? And are these not among the "living and the dead", which Jesus was "ready" to judge, in 1 Peter 4:5?

When was this to happen? Read verse 36. "Assuredly, I say to you all these things shall come upon this generation".

The evidence is overwhelming to the candid student. The destruction of Jerusalem was far more than the fall of a Jewish city. There were universal, spiritual, eternal realities at work, "behind the scenes", but very present and very real nonetheless.

Summary

We have examined the contention that Jerusalem's fall was simply a localized judgment on the Jews. We have shown from Jesus' own words that he did not consider it to be so. The whole world (oikoumene), which was to hear the message of judgment, Matthew 24:14, was to be judged, Acts 17:30-31; and be in distress, Luke 21:25-26, Revelation 3:10. We have seen this was definitely to happen in that generation.

Further, we have demonstrated that other New Testament writers taught that "universal judgment" was imminent, Matthew 16:27-28, cf. Revelation 22:12. Peter taught it, 1 Peter 4:5,7,17; James 5:7-9 and others.

Finally, we have seen Jesus unequivocally state that the judgment of all the

dead, all the way back to creation, was to be when Jerusalem fell, Matthew 23:29-39.

For all these reasons and more we find untenable the contention that the fall of Jerusalem was a localized judgment. It was in fact the universal judgment of the living and the dead!

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