

## WHERE DO WE BEGIN? - IV

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Having discussed Paul's clear language in the thirteenth chapter of Romans and the implications of that language in our last article, we are ready to continue through the epistles of Paul, and then into the general epistles (i.e., non-Pauline), tracing this overriding sense of imminence that pervades all of these epistles.

5. I Corinthians 1:4-8 "I thank my God...that you were enriched...in all utterance and knowledge...so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end..." This context is very critical not only for grasping the scope of the time of the coming of Christ, but also, it is very important to correctly understand other key eschatological contexts in the same letter (e.g., 7:29-31; 10:11; 15:1-58). So lucid and demanding is this passage that many expositors not holding to several key items of the Preterist view readily admit that this is a passage that deals with the A.D.70 judgment of Jerusalem.

The reason this admission is made is the link of events (specifically the work of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit until the "revelation of Christ at the end"). That this is a miraculous context cannot be denied. What isn't admitted by many within the traditional mind-set is that it is also just as clear that it is the "coming of Christ" that brings an end to this period of miraculous confirmation and activity. Those who attribute this to A.D. 70 most likely have done so because they have seen the impotency of the traditional explanation in answering the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic debaters who say that if this is the second coming of Christ then this context demands that the miraculous gifts continue their confirmation process.

It also is referred to as "the end." What "end" and "coming" could Paul possibly be referring to? Should the traditionalist argue as many have, that this is the future fiery end of the universe at the return of Christ, then he

must also face the unsavory consequences of that position. Not the least of which is the continuance of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. It is no wonder that many of these men opposed to the Pentecostal view have readily attributed this to the A.D. 70 "figurative, spiritual" judgment and return of Christ.

Of course it is this writer's opinion that this is the correct answer. The question that demands a response to this admission by many traditionalists is, how many comings, ends, and judgments of Jesus are there? Consistency is sometimes a very rare thing in the world of biblical exposition, and nowhere is this more evident than in the studies of eschatology. What is there in this context that would alert any reader to the fact that Paul is now dealing with an entirely different coming of Christ and consummating end than that which elsewhere is foretold by Christ and others? For instance, how would they tell the difference between this context and similar contexts in the very same letter that are overwhelmingly attributed by modern expositors to a yet future coming (e.g., 7:29-31; 10:11; 15:1-58)?

We are people who claim that the Bible makes sense and often quote from this very same letter to prove that God is not the author of confusion (14:33). We must admit if honest that there is nothing in any of these contexts that would persuade these original recipients of the letter to see anything other than one coming, revelation, consummation and end. They were taught to expect an imminent return of Christ that would bring to an end the immature age of the miraculous, and that would usher in the full-grown perfect age of the New Covenant (12:31-13:13).

6. Hebrews 8:13 "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." This passage absolutely horrifies the traditionalist, who must resort to "expositional gymnastics," to attempt an answer for the obvious incongruities for the view that all the transition from the old to the new covenant was accomplished at Pentecost.

How do they answer this you ask. In a written discussion that this writer is having with one brother on this issue, he argues as do many others, in a totally fallacious way, but quite honestly the only way he can. In response to my pressing him on this matter, he said: "In what sense then was the Old Law becoming obsolete and growing old and ready to vanish away? Notice what the Hebrew writer has done; He First quotes Jeremiah. In that he (Jeremiah) saith, a 'new covenant, he hath made the first old.' When Jeremiah wrote of a new covenant, he made the first old - in his own day. Then he identified those things which characterize that which is old. 'But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away.' The Old Covenant was becoming old and nigh unto vanishing away in Jeremiah's day; not in the first 40 years of the New Covenant. Jeremiah also implied even back in his day that the Old Covenant was nigh (Gk. eggus) unto vanishing away."

Even the casual reader of the text can see the fallacy of such an argument. It is clear that this brother, as well as all others who espouse this argument, must attribute the statement of the Hebrew writer in 8:13 to Jeremiah. Read for yourself the text of Jeremiah's prophecy and you will see that Jeremiah didn't speak these words, nor are they to be attributed in application to his day 600 years before Christ.

The Hebrew writer quotes the prophecy of Jeremiah (8:8-11; c.f. Jer.31:31-34), and then makes the application of the prophecy to his day and to the lives of his readers. It was God, not Jeremiah that made the statement. Christ's death upon the cross made the Law obsolete (Eph.2:14-16). But it is also very clear that this process making the Law obsolete was presently in progress at that time.

Next, the Law was to bring us to Christ and His fulfilled salvation (Gal.3), therefore how could it be obsolete 600 years before it accomplished this goal? Jesus said He came "to fulfill the Law" (Mt.5:17). For something to be "obsolete" it must have outlived its "fulfilled" design and purpose, but its purpose was to bring Christ and He was to fulfill it, therefore how in the name of reason could it be obsolete 600 years before Christ? It is sheer desperation to avoid the imminent time statements that lead to an argument

such as this. This is critical because of the next passages we will examine in the Hebrew epistle.

7. Hebrews 10:25,37. "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching...For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry." As this writer is fond of saying to the congregation of the Lord's people which he serves, the clarity and force of the time demands in these two verses are "ungetoverable."

There is absolutely no satisfactory explanation for this context that can come from the futurist construction of eschatology. The only attempt that is sometimes made (but very seldom because of its abject weakness) is that this day in verse 25 is the Lord's day (i.e. Sunday) on which we come together to worship. The clear problem with such a passage is that it would demand that we encourage one another more on Tuesday than Monday, more on Wednesday than Tuesday, and so on, not to miss the Sunday worship. Such a contrived exposition drastically misses the whole tenor of the passage and woefully ignores the rest of the context.

The only other attempt that can be made is the desperate attempt that one brother has made to me when he said, "no explicit referent is given for 'the day' spoken of here." He then goes on to admit that, "the destruction of Jerusalem is a strong possibility. But I do not see the necessary connection between this event and the coming of Christ as viewed traditionally." It is absolutely startling when one witnesses the lengths to which the traditionalist will go to avoid the clear ramifications of these passages.

Unless one has an agenda to defend the meaning of this day it cannot be missed in the context. Also as I stated to this man, albeit a subjective point, it is amazing to me that he could not find a referent for "the day" when the world of biblical scholarship is overwhelmingly united upon its referring to the second coming of Christ in judgment. There are very few that dissent from this view.

But one need not rely on anything other than the context in this passage, because it is so vividly clear that its referent is the day Christ Himself foretold of, in which He would come in judgment (Matt.23:34 - 24:1ff.). In verses 26-27, he identifies the consequences of willful sin, namely "...a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation..." In verse 29 he talks about the "worse punishment" coming for those who reject Christ as compared to those who rejected Moses. Then verse 30 simply ends all argument as to the "referent" of this day. He says: "...`Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, `The Lord will judge His people.'"

It is clear that one must have all kinds of "help" to misunderstand what the referent is. It is the judgment day of Christ. The question that we continue to ask is, are there any time indicators given by the inspired writers for the time frame of that day? The answer again is a resounding "YES".

First of all, let it be powerfully stated that there is immense problem here for the traditionalist construction relative to the characteristics of this day. The traditional posit is that this day of judgment is a day that will have no signs to identify its coming (i.e. it is a day that Jesus Himself still doesn't know, so there certainly can be no signs to man), and secondly, there can be no specific time indicators for this day - it will come "like a thief in the night."

In response to this, we have already demonstrated that this is the judgment day (if not the Bible is hopelessly unintelligible and God is the author of confusion, 1 Cor.14:33). Next, the writer makes it plain in verse 25 that it is a day that they can "see approaching." If the traditional construct is correct, how is it that they could see it approaching in that day, but we who are 2000 years closer cannot see it? It is clear that this is in complete harmony with Matthew 24, that if they heeded the warnings and signs of the Savior, they would know the general time frame of His coming in judgment.

As far as the time is concerned, verse 37 is the absolute "debate ender" as to the time frame for this return. They could see it approaching because it was near. "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: `For yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.'" The literal rendering is much more specific (even though that doesn't seem possible) for it says in "a very, very little while."

Is Jesus coming again? When? How long will it be? In a "very, very little while," and he won't tarry! Does putting that off for 2000+ years qualify as "tarrying"? I would say that it is a little more severe than tarrying. Again without a man-made doctrine to defend, there is no mistaking the truth of the Hebrew writer - Jesus was coming back and it would be very soon indeed.

Again we see the concept of imminence vividly portrayed and substantiated in scripture. If we have a problem understanding these concepts, the problem does not lie in the non-specificity of the Bible's time frame, rather it is to be found in our preconceived ideas about the return and judgment of Christ. (To be continued).

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