

The End of the Ages

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This study has to do with the meaning of “the End of the Age.” This phrase is used several times in the NT and is generally translated “end of the world.” I think this translation can deceive us of its true meaning, and hence, the reason for our study.

The phrase “end of the age” is found six times in the NT; five times in Matthew and once in Hebrews. A similar phrase with a plural “ends of the ages” occurs in 1 Corinthians. I list them here (NASB):

Matt. 13:39 The harvest is *the end of the age*.

Matt. 13:40 So shall it be at *the end of the age*.

Matt. 13:49 So it will be at *the end of the age*.

Matt. 24:3 Tell us when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of *the end of the age*?

Matt. 28:20 and Lo, I am with you always, even to *the end of the age*.

1 Cor. 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the *end of the ages* has come.

Heb. 9:26 But now he has appeared once for all at *the end of the ages* to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The NASB and other recent versions consistently translate this phrase as the “end of the age” rather than the “end of the world.” And this is to our advantage, for now we can see that Christ and the apostles were referring to a different time frame than that of our world today. Instead, I believe they are speaking about the end of the Jewish Age. To see this is true, please consider the questions asked by the disciples as it is recorded in the three different parallel gospel accounts:

Matt. 24:3 records these questions as:

1. *When* will these things be?
2. What will be the *sign*:
 - a. of your coming and
 - b. of the end of the age?

Mk. 13:4 records these questions as:

1. *When* will these things be?
2. And what will be the *sign* when all these things are going to be fulfilled?

Lk. 21:5 records these questions as:

1. *When* therefore will these things be?
2. And what will be the *sign* when these things are about to take place?

Mt. 24:3 has only two questions, not three, the same as Mark and Luke, based on its diagrammatical structure. The apostles desired to know “*the sign*” that would

indicate his coming and the end of the age, as if *one* sign indicated both events. Both Mark and Luke ask for the sign that precedes the events of the first question. And the first question is a query about the destruction of the temple. The sign of his coming and of the end of the age must simply be another way of referring to the destruction of the temple. Jesus, therefore, tells us when the end of the age will be. The change of the ages does not occur at the cross nor at Pentecost. It occurs only after all these things have been fulfilled and Jesus has returned.

Notice how Jesus answers the disciples' two questions. He first gives several *signs* to look for before dealing with the *time* question. He includes general references to time (Mt. 24:6, 8, 14, 15, 21, 29) with the discussion of the various signs (Mt. 24:5-28), but finally deals specifically with the time question in Mt. 24:29-51. Here are the signs He commands them to watch for:

- (1) coming of false Christ's
- (2) wars and rumors of war
- (3) natural calamities of famines and earthquakes
- (4) persecutions and falling away
- (5) the gospel of the kingdom preached in the whole world (inhabited earth).
Following these things comes "the end." The sign he gives of the end is the abomination of desolation which Luke interprets as the armies gathering around Jerusalem.
- (6) the great tribulation followed immediately by
- (7) the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds and
- (8) the gathering of his elect from the four winds.

To further indicate that he is speaking of the destruction of the temple, Jesus says, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." The word "generation" means "those who are contemporaries or live at the same time." The adjective "this" modifying it is further proof that it refers to Jesus' contemporaries. After analysis in its context, is it not easier to see this as a prophecy of the destruction of the temple? Some agree with this but also see it as merely a type of Christ's coming at the end of this age. Some further confuse things by saying the time from the cross to the present is "the Last Days." But the term "Last Days" is the last days of the Jewish age, not of the Christian age. And the term "last days" in Old Testament usage never meant some long drawn-out extended period of time, especially not thousands of years. It always meant the last final waning years of a nation's existence before it was crushed.

Peter could, therefore, declare on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ that "this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel: "And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth My Spirit upon all mankind." (Acts 2:16,17) The church was really established in the last days of the Jewish age. It was not declared to be the beginning of the new age or the age to come. One generation separates them from the end of the age. Jesus taught that certain events must take place before the end came (1 through 8 above). These events did not happen before Pentecost.

Paul said Jesus died to rescue them from the present evil age (Gal. 1:4). Do

you think it proper to speak of the age of the New Covenant as a evil age? Paul said that the apostles “speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away...the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;”

(1 Cor. 2:6,8). If Paul during the Christian age in which Christ is the ruler, who are these rulers? Are they not the same rulers that crucified Christ? And Paul speaks of them as “this age.” How does he do that if he recognizes the Christian age. Our traditions recognize it and by our traditions we make void the word of God. Paul also believed that the ends of the ages had come upon them (1 Cor. 10:11).

Paul also taught that the coming of the Lord was at hand (Phil. 4:5); that the night was nearly over and the day was almost here (Rom. 13:12). Is the Christian age called the night that was nearly over? How could it be possible for the new age just begun to already be over?

The “end of the [Jewish] age” occurred at God’s judgment on Israel in AD 70, not at the cross. This seems to contradict Col. 2:14 which says that a “certificate of debt” involving “decrees against us” was nailed to the cross. Cancelling a “debt” incurred by breaking the law is not the same thing as doing away with the law itself. Christ did not abolish the Law at the cross, but rather paid the price demanded by the Law while the Law was still in effect. Matt. 5:17-19 states that every jot and tittle of the Law would remain in effect until it was all fulfilled by the passing away of the Jewish “heavens and earth” in AD 70.

In Eph. 2:14 Paul speaks of those who were formerly two peoples. But now these two are one new men because Christ has broken down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in his flesh the enmity. Does not the enmity equate with the certificate of debt in Col. 2:14? For he says they are reconciled in one body to God through the cross having put to death the enmity. So nailing it to the cross and putting to death the enmity equate to each other. Now is the Law in view? Is it not rather the debt of sin guilt that had broken the law that is taken away?

Else what will you do with other scriptures that teach that the Law is still present? For example, Heb. 8:13 which teaches that the first covenant was becoming obsolete and growing old and ready to disappear? Have you ever wondered why Paul remained loyal to the Law but would not permit the Gentiles to keep it? (Acts 21:17-26). In all the problems about keeping the Law, the Jews were never asked to give up the Law. The Law continues to be used as scriptural authority (2 Tim. 3:16). He says that faith establishes Law (Rom. 3:31).

But the question is: How do we Gentiles keep it? As a Jew, Paul kept the Law in regard to fasting, circumcision, sacrifice, and holy days. But Gentiles were told to abstain from blood, from things sacrificed, things strangled, fornication and specifically forbidden to keep the Jewish laws. Note the continuation of the context of Col. 2:14-17: As result of Christ removing the certificate of debt that was opposed to us, we are not to let anyone judge us in what we eat or drink, or how we keep Holy days. These are mere shadows of what is to come. And the substance belongs

to Christ.

The NIV has greatly erred by giving a past tense for a present tense verb so as to avoid the question of the new age as “coming” and make you think that Paul said, “These are shadows of the things that have come.” Gentiles kept the substance of the things to come (they were not present yet) rather than the shadow of the Law (which was still present). In Hebrews 10:1 the Law is spoken of in the present tense as “having a shadow of the good things to come.” These verses declare without a doubt that the old age was present and the new age was yet to come. If not, then the Law is not a shadow of the new age but of another yet to come!

We even keep the substance of the Law today. The Law declared beforehand (in type) the New Covenant. Therefore, what the Law said was always true! Can the word of God ever be broken? No, then why do we say that the law was abolished? But if we mean fulfilled, we can readily see the Law as a typical arrangement until the end of the age and the ultimate arrangement was given. On some matters, the Law still guides us: in the areas of marriage and divorce; concerning inequities between people; about the legality of abortion; what sin is. It declares beforehand the true sacrifice—Christ. It shows his lordship over all peoples. It declares the Kingdom of God. You can prove all doctrine by the Law. It is more than a history of God’s people; it is a prophetic declaration of the salvation in Jesus Christ.

The two on the road to Emmaus were chastised by Christ for not believing all the prophets had spoken. He began with Moses and with all the prophets and explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures. We, like them, are still missing Jesus in the OT.

Because we have not believed Jesus and the apostles concerning the end of the age, we have added an age that does not exist! We have added the Christian age. It goes something like this: Jesus taught in Mt. 12:32 that anyone who speaks against him can be forgiven, but if he speaks against the Holy Spirit, he cannot be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. The age that Jesus calls “this age” must be the Jewish age, and “the age to come” must be the Christian age. But in Mk. 10:30 Jesus teaches that if one gives up family and home for the gospel, he will receive a hundred times as much in this present age, and in the age to come, eternal life. Now since eternal life is to be received in heaven (it is reasoned), this passage speaks of the Christian age and the Heavenly age. We by our traditions cause Jesus not to know in which age he is living.

Jesus taught that the end of the age would come with the destruction of the temple. In his parables he taught that the good seed and bad seed would exist together until the end of the age. Likewise in the parable of the net, good and bad fish are caught and it is likened to the end of the age. In these lessons is Jesus ignoring the end of the Jewish age to teach concerning the end of the Christian age? But that is the way we teach it, isn’t it?

No new age was heralded in at the cross or Pentecost. Their present age was evil (Gal. 1:4) and the god of the age was Satan (2 Cor. 4:4). Paul said that they

stood at the ends of the ages (1 Cor. 10:11). In Gal. 4 Hagar, represented both the Old Covenant and the Jerusalem that “now is” (the Old was still present), and Sarah represented both the New Covenant and the New Jerusalem that was “above” (it was still to come). Is this arrangement still valid today? Even in their day they had drawn near to Mount Zion (fulfilling the type shown at Sinai), to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant. They were waiting for the shaking of heaven and earth (a prophecy from Haggai) which would separate the created things (of the type) from the things that could not be shaken (things of substance of the new order). Out of this shaking they would receive the kingdom unshaken (Heb. 12:22-28).

This time also correlates with Daniel’s prophecy of the little horn that made war on the saints until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was given to the saints and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom (Dan. 7:22). The saints of the Last Days were given the Spirit as an earnest of their inheritance. With the shaking, the earnest of the Spirit was consummated in the receiving of the kingdom now free of the typical arrangement. The day came for vision and prophecy to be sealed up (Dan. 9:24) and for the prophet and evil spirit to pass out of the land (Zech. 13:2). A time for those things that were in part to cease. A time for that which was perfect (complete) to come. (1 Cor. 13:10).

I hope that in these thoughts to at least give you my reasons for suggesting that the ending the Jewish age at the cross and inserting a Christian age in between “the coming age” is not handling accurately the word of truth.