Fulfilled Prophecies

The Camp, The City, And The Coming Judgment



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Hebrews 13 was written to believers who were living during the closing years of the Old Covenant age. The writer wasn't describing the end of the physical universe. He was urging believers to separate themselves from the old covenant system centered in earthly Jerusalem because that system was approaching its covenant judgment.

† The language of the camp, the city, and the city to come becomes especially powerful when read alongside Jesus'

warnings concerning Jerusalem. Jesus had already told His disciples that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and that they were to flee when they saw that judgment approaching (Luke 21:20-22).
† Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes that the Old Covenant was becoming obsolete and was ready to disappear (Hebrews 8:13). Hebrews 13 brings that message to a practical conclusion. They were to go outside the camp to Christ because the earthly city they knew wasn't their lasting city.

Hebrews 13:11-14
For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the Holy Place by the high priest as an offering for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood. So then, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.
† The writer deliberately connects Jesus' suffering outside Jerusalem with the Old Covenant practice of taking the bodies of the sin offerings outside the camp. Jesus suffered outside the gate, and His followers were called to go outside the camp to Him.
† Going outside the camp wasn't merely about geography. It pictured separation from the Old Covenant order that had rejected Christ. The believers receiving Hebrews were being called to identify completely with Jesus even when doing so brought rejection and reproach (Hebrews 10:32-34).
† The statement, we have not here an abiding city, had tremendous significance for first-century Jewish believers. Earthly Jerusalem wasn't going to continue as the center of God's covenant people. Jesus had already pronounced judgment upon that city and its temple (Matthew 23:37-38).
† The city they were seeking wasn't another earthly capital. Hebrews had already identified their true destination as Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem

(Hebrews 12:22-24).

Hebrews 8:13
When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.
† The Old Covenant wasn't described as permanently continuing alongside the New Covenant. It was becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear.
† When Hebrews was written, the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and earthly Jerusalem were still standing. Yet their covenant significance had already been surpassed by Christ and the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:11-12).
† The approaching removal of that old order explains the urgency running throughout Hebrews. The believers weren't to return to what was ready to disappear. They were to remain faithful to Christ (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Hebrews 10:25-27
not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.
† These believers could see the day drawing near. The warning was meaningful because the judgment belonged to their historical horizon, not to an event thousands of years beyond their lifetime.
† The approaching day involved judgment upon the covenant order that had rejected the Son of God. Earlier, Jesus had warned that judgment would come upon that generation (Matthew 23:35-36).
† Hebrews wasn't encouraging believers to calculate an unknown date in the distant future. They were already watching the day approach and were commanded to encourage one

another as it drew closer.

Hebrews 12:22-24
But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.
† Hebrews doesn't say believers were waiting thousands of years to come to Mount Zion. It says they had come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem.
† This identifies the city of Hebrews 13:14. The contrast wasn't between Jerusalem and a future physical city descending onto a reconstructed earth. The contrast was between earthly Jerusalem under the fading Old Covenant and heavenly Jerusalem under the New Covenant.
† Jesus is the mediator of this New Covenant. His blood established what the blood of animals could never accomplish, permanent access to God and covenant cleansing (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Luke 21:20-22
But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.
† Jesus specifically identified Jerusalem as the city facing approaching desolation. His disciples were given a visible sign, Jerusalem surrounded by armies.
† They weren't instructed to gather inside Jerusalem for protection. They were told to leave it. That gives remarkable historical force to Hebrews' command to go outside the camp and its declaration that they had no lasting city there.

† Jesus called these the days of vengeance and said they were connected with the fulfillment of what had been written. The destruction of Jerusalem wasn't an unrelated historical accident. It stood within the covenant judgment Jesus had announced (Luke 19:41-44).

Matthew 24:15-18
Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place - let the reader understand - then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get things out of his house. And whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.
† Jesus' warning was directed to people in Judea who could personally respond when the signs appeared. They could flee, leave their houses, and escape the approaching calamity.
† The urgency matches Hebrews. Don't turn back to the old system. Don't place confidence in earthly Jerusalem. Follow Christ outside the camp.
† Jesus later placed the fulfillment within that generation (Matthew 24:34). Hebrews was written to believers living within that same first-century period of expectation.

Hebrews 12:26-28
And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;
† Hebrews describes a removal and a remaining. What could be shaken was being removed, while God's unshakable kingdom remained.
† The believers were already receiving that kingdom. Their security wasn't found in the temple, the Levitical priesthood,

animal sacrifices, or earthly Jerusalem. Their security was in Christ and His kingdom (Hebrews 12:28).
† This is why Hebrews 13 could tell them they had no lasting city there. The physical city could fall, but the kingdom they were receiving couldn't be shaken.

Hebrews 13:12-13
Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood. So then, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.
† The central message is Christ. Jesus stood outside the gate, rejected by the religious establishment, yet His blood was the blood that truly sanctified His people.
† Going to Christ meant leaving confidence in the system that had rejected Him. The choice confronting those first-century believers was increasingly clear, remain attached to the old camp or follow Jesus outside it.
† When Jerusalem and the temple fell in AD 70, Christ remained. The New Covenant remained. The kingdom remained. The heavenly Jerusalem remained. What God established through His Son couldn't be destroyed by Roman armies.

Historical References
† Josephus, writing about the Jewish-Roman War, described Jerusalem's siege, famine, internal violence, burning, and eventual destruction by the Romans. His account provides important historical testimony concerning the catastrophe that overtook Jerusalem in AD 70.
† Josephus also described the destruction of the temple during the Roman conquest. The earthly sanctuary that had dominated Jewish religious life was reduced to ruins, demonstrating historically how completely that first-century order was brought down.
† Eusebius later recorded a tradition that believers in Jerusalem had been instructed to leave the city before the war and settle at Pella. Whatever questions remain concerning the details of

that tradition, it shows that early Christians understood Jesus' warning to flee Jerusalem as connected with the first-century Jewish war.
† These historical accounts don't establish doctrine. Scripture establishes doctrine. History provides valuable testimony that the first-century setting described by Jesus and anticipated throughout Hebrews culminated in Jerusalem's destruction.

How It Applies To Us Today
† We don't stand where the original Hebrew believers stood. We aren't waiting for Jerusalem's AD 70 judgment to arrive. That judgment belongs to first-century history.
† We don't need an earthly temple, earthly priesthood, animal sacrifices, or an earthly Jerusalem to approach God. Through Christ we have access to God in the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:19-22).
† We have come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem. Our relationship with God isn't centered on a geographical city but on Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).
† The lesson remains powerful. Everything built by human hands can be shaken, but Christ's kingdom can't be shaken. Our confidence rests in what God established through His Son.
† The camp was left behind. The earthly city faced its appointed judgment. The heavenly city remained. Christ brought His people into the covenant reality toward which the old system had always pointed (Hebrews 13:14).

Q & A Appendix
Q: What was the camp in Hebrews 13?
A: In context, the camp represents the Old Covenant religious order from which believers were being called to separate themselves and identify with Christ outside the gate (Hebrews 13:11-13).

Q: What was the city that didn't continue?
A: The immediate contrast includes earthly Jerusalem, the

center of the Old Covenant system that was approaching judgment. Jesus had already announced its coming desolation (Luke 21:20-22).

Q: What was the city to come?
A: Hebrews identifies it as Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The believers had already come to this heavenly city through Christ and the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: Does Hebrews 13:14 mean Christians are still waiting for the heavenly Jerusalem to arrive?
A: Hebrews 12:22 says, but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The city was a present covenant reality for believers even while the old earthly city was approaching its judgment (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: How does Jerusalem's destruction fit Hebrews 13?
A: Jesus had warned that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and told His followers to flee (Luke 21:20-22). Hebrews likewise called believers outside the camp and reminded them that they had no lasting city there (Hebrews 13:13-14).

Q: What remains for believers today?
A: We live in the reality of the New Covenant and the kingdom that can't be shaken. We have access to God through Christ and have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 10:19-22; 12:22-28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Hebrews 13:11-14; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 10:25-27; Hebrews 12:22-24; Luke 21:20-22; Matthew 24:15-18; Hebrews 12:26-28; Hebrews 13:12-13

† Josephus, The Wars of the Jews; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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