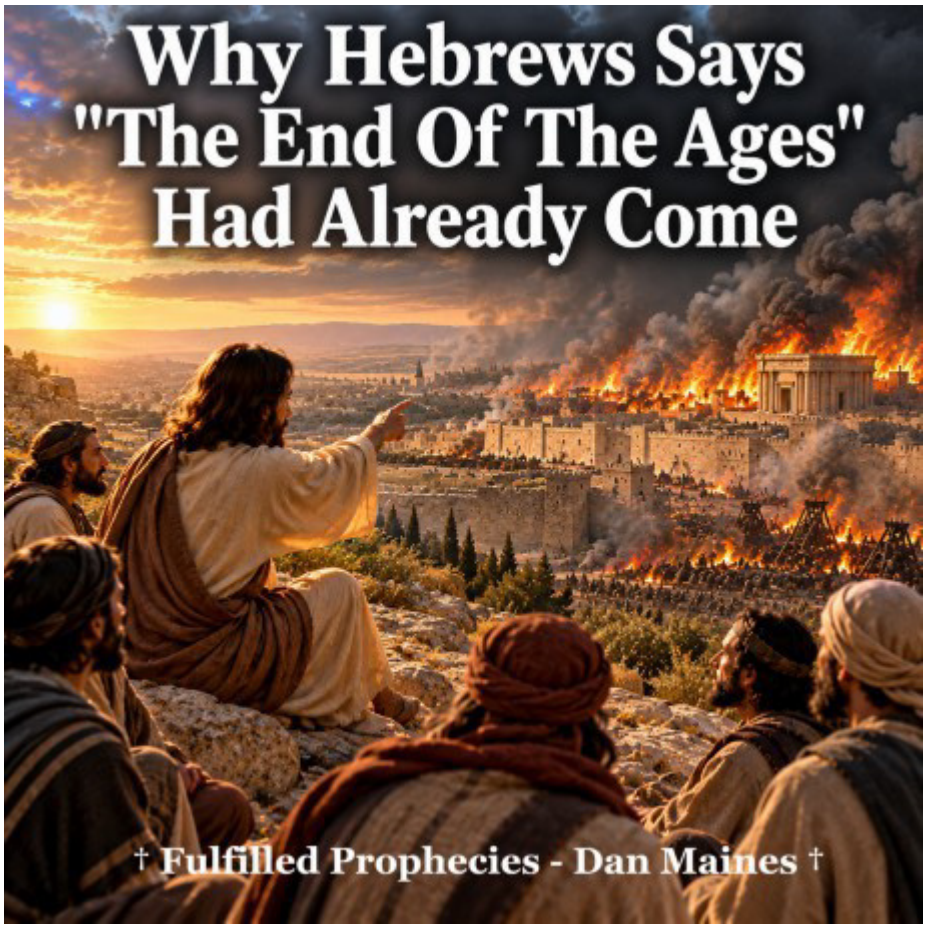
Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Hebrews Says "The End Of The Ages" Had Already Come



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Many Christians have been taught that the end of the ages refers to the destruction of the physical universe at some future time. However, the New Testament places the end of the ages within the lifetime of the apostles and the first-century believers. The inspired writers didn't describe something thousands of years away. They declared that the end of the ages had already come upon their generation (Hebrews 9:26; 1 Corinthians

10:11).
† Hebrews and 1 Corinthians provide two powerful witnesses to this truth. Both identify the first century as the time when the ages were reaching their appointed conclusion. The subject wasn't the destruction of planet Earth but the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose through Jesus Christ and the passing away of the Old Covenant order (Hebrews 8:13; 9:26).
† Jesus came during the final days of the Old Covenant age. His sacrifice established the New Covenant, and the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70 brought the remaining Old Covenant system to its historical conclusion. The temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and covenant administration that had governed Israel were removed, while Christ's everlasting kingdom remained (Hebrews 9:15; 12:27-28).
† To understand the end of the ages, we must allow the inspired writers to identify their own time, their own audience, and the covenant that was passing away (Hebrews 1:1-2; 8:13).

The End Of The Ages Had Already Arrived

Hebrews 9:26
Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.
† Notice the word now. The writer didn't say Christ would appear thousands of years later at the consummation of the ages. He declared that Christ had already appeared at that appointed time (Galatians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:20).
† The consummation of the ages was connected directly to Christ's sacrifice. His death wasn't preparation for another sacrifice at the end of human history. It was the once-for-all sacrifice that accomplished what the Old Covenant sacrifices could never accomplish (Hebrews 10:1-14).
† The ages were reaching their fulfillment because the promises, shadows, sacrifices, and priesthood of the Old Covenant were finding their completion in Jesus Christ

(Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1).
† The writer used the past appearance of Christ as evidence that the consummation had arrived. That's why we can't move his statement into our future without ignoring the historical setting of his words (Hebrews 1:2; 9:26).

The Ends Of The Ages Had Come Upon Paul's Generation

1 Corinthians 10:11
Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.
† Paul identified the people upon whom the ends of the ages had come. He said our instruction, referring to himself and the first-century believers receiving his letter (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:11).
† Paul didn't say the ends of the ages would come upon Christians living thousands of years later. He declared that they had already come upon his own generation (Romans 13:11-12).
† The historical examples of Israel were written to instruct those living during the covenant transition. The same nation that had received the Law was approaching the judgment Jesus had announced (Matthew 23:35-38; Luke 21:20-22).
† Hebrews 9:26 and 1 Corinthians 10:11 agree. Christ appeared at the consummation of the ages, and Paul declared that the ends of the ages had come upon the believers of his day.
† These statements weren't predictions of the end of the physical universe. They identified the first-century fulfillment of God's covenant purposes through Christ (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 8:13).

God Had Spoken In These Last Days

Hebrews 1:1-2
God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through

whom also He made the world.
† The writer identified his own generation as living in these last days. He didn't say the last days would begin thousands of years after Christ's appearance (Acts 2:16-17).
† The contrast is between God's former revelation through the prophets and His final revelation through His Son. The Old Covenant prophets anticipated the Messiah, and Jesus brought their promises to fulfillment (Luke 24:44; Matthew 5:17).
† These last days were the closing period of the Old Covenant age, not the final days of planet Earth. The writer was addressing believers living while the former covenant system was approaching its disappearance (Hebrews 8:13).
† If the last days had already arrived when Hebrews was written, we shouldn't redefine them as a period that wouldn't begin until thousands of years later (Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20).

The First Covenant Was Ready To Disappear

Hebrews 8:13
When He said, A new covenant, He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.
† This verse identifies what was coming to an end. It wasn't the physical heavens and Earth. It was the first covenant, which had become obsolete through the establishment of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6).
† Notice the language becoming obsolete, growing old, and ready to disappear. The writer described a process already underway during his lifetime (Hebrews 9:8-10).
† Christ established the New Covenant through His death, but the Old Covenant temple and sacrificial system continued operating until Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:9).
† The destruction of Jerusalem didn't make Christ's sacrifice effective. His sacrifice had already accomplished redemption. AD 70 publicly demonstrated that the former covenant

administration had reached its appointed end (Hebrews 9:12-15; Matthew 24:1-2).
† That's why the end of the ages must be understood in its covenant setting. The former system was disappearing, while the kingdom established through Christ would remain (Hebrews 12:27-28).

The Time Of Reformation Had Arrived

Hebrews 9:8-10
The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.
† The writer described the Old Covenant sanctuary as a symbol connected to the present time of his readers. Its regulations were temporary and awaited the appointed time of reformation (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).
† That reformation came through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest. His sacrifice accomplished what the repeated animal sacrifices could never accomplish (Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:11-14).
† The Old Covenant sanctuary represented restricted access under the former priesthood. Through Christ, believers received access to God through a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-22).
† The continued existence of the earthly temple didn't mean Christ's sacrifice was incomplete. It meant the old administration was still visibly present during the transition that ended with Jerusalem's destruction (Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:2).
† The time of reformation wasn't postponed until the end of world history. It arrived through Christ's completed work and the establishment of His superior covenant (Hebrews 7:12; 9:15).

Christ Appeared In The Last Times

1 Peter 1:20
For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you
† Peter confirmed the same historical setting described in Hebrews. Christ had appeared in these last times for the benefit of the believers Peter was addressing (1 Peter 1:1-2).
† Peter didn't describe the last times as a distant period beyond his generation. He connected them to the historical appearance of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:16-21).
† Christ's appearance fulfilled God's eternal redemptive purpose. The promises made through the prophets were reaching their fulfillment through His suffering, resurrection, and exaltation (1 Peter 1:10-12).
† Peter and the writer of Hebrews weren't describing two different sets of last days. Both identified the first-century appearance of Christ as belonging to the concluding period of the former covenant age (Hebrews 1:2; 9:26).

Jesus Identified The End Of The Age

Matthew 24:3
As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?
† The disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age immediately after He predicted the destruction of the temple. Their question arose from the judgment He had just announced (Matthew 24:1-2).
† Jesus didn't tell them the physical universe would be destroyed. He described the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the circumstances surrounding that generation (Luke 21:20-24).
† The end of the age concerned the conclusion of the Old Covenant order centered upon Jerusalem and its temple. The

kingdom of Christ wasn't ending. It was being established as the enduring covenant reality (Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 12:28).
† The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 provides the historical fulfillment of the temple judgment Jesus described (Luke 21:5-6, 20-22).

Matthew 24:34
Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.
† Jesus identified the generation that would witness the fulfillment of His prophecy. He didn't say a generation thousands of years later would see these things (Matthew 23:36; Luke 21:32).
† His words placed the judgment within the lifetime of those who heard Him. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 occurred within that first-century generation (Luke 21:20-24).
† This agrees with Hebrews and Paul. The end of the age wasn't an event waiting for our generation. It belonged to the generation that witnessed the final removal of the Old Covenant temple system (Hebrews 8:13; 1 Corinthians 10:11).
† We must honor the time statements Jesus gave rather than extending their fulfillment beyond the generation He specifically identified (Matthew 16:27-28; 24:34).

The Coming Judgment Was Very Near

Hebrews 10:37
FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.
† The writer told his first-century readers that the coming of Christ was very near. He didn't describe an event that would be delayed for thousands of years (Hebrews 10:25).
† The warning concerned believers who were facing persecution and needed endurance as the former covenant age approached its conclusion (Hebrews 10:32-36).
† Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem fulfilled His warnings concerning that generation. The destruction of the city

and temple demonstrated the removal of the covenant order that had rejected Him (Matthew 23:37-38; 24:1-2).
† The expression very little while must be understood from the perspective of the original readers. It wasn't a promise intended to remain unfulfilled for countless generations (James 5:8-9).
† The same letter that declared the first covenant ready to disappear also announced that Christ's coming was near. These statements belong together in their first-century setting (Hebrews 8:13; 9:26).

The Shaking Of The Old Covenant Order

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 us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;
† The writer contrasted what could be shaken and removed with the kingdom that couldn't be shaken. The emphasis was upon the removal of the temporary order and the permanence of Christ's kingdom (Hebrews 8:13).
† The Old Covenant system had served its appointed purpose. Its priesthood, sacrifices, and earthly sanctuary pointed forward to the greater realities established through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:11-12; 10:1).
† The shaking represented the removal of what was temporary so that what was permanent would remain. In the fulfilled perspective, Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 marked the historical removal of the former covenant administration (Matthew 24:1-2).
† The believers weren't waiting to receive an earthly political kingdom. They were receiving the kingdom of Christ, which

couldn't be shaken or destroyed (Luke 17:20-21; Daniel 7:14).
† The end of the ages didn't mean the end of God's kingdom. It meant the completion of the transition from the former covenant order into the enduring New Covenant reality (Hebrews 8:6; 12:28).

The New Covenant Was The Promised Destination

Hebrews 9:15
For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
† Christ didn't come merely to improve the Old Covenant system. He came to establish the promised New Covenant through His own sacrifice (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20).
† The first covenant couldn't provide the final redemption accomplished by Christ. His death secured the promised inheritance for those who belong to Him (Hebrews 7:25; 10:14).
† The consummation of the ages was therefore a redemptive fulfillment. Everything anticipated by the former covenant found its appointed completion in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16, 26-29).
† The destruction of the temple didn't end God's relationship with His people. Through Christ, believers became God's dwelling place, with access to the Father through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18-22).
† The promised destination wasn't another earthly temple or a restored system of animal sacrifices. It was the everlasting covenant relationship established through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19-22; 13:20).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, recorded the Jewish revolt against Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. His account provides

historical evidence for the catastrophe Jesus had announced concerning Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:20-24).
† In The Jewish War, Books 5-6, Josephus described the Roman siege, the suffering within Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple. These events correspond to the historical setting of Jesus' warnings concerning the city (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-22).
† Eusebius of Caesarea, writing in the fourth century, connected Jerusalem's destruction with divine judgment upon the generation that rejected Christ. His Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, preserves early Christian reflection on the fulfillment of Jesus' warnings (Matthew 23:37-38).
† Eusebius also recorded the tradition that Christians in Jerusalem had received a warning and departed to Pella before the war. This tradition illustrates how early Christians understood the importance of escaping the approaching judgment (Luke 21:20-21).
† John Chrysostom, in his Homilies on Matthew, discussed Jesus' prediction concerning Jerusalem and recognized the destruction of the temple as a fulfillment of Christ's words (Matthew 24:1-2).
† These historical writers weren't all Full Preterists, and their theological conclusions differed. However, their accounts confirm that Jerusalem's destruction was a real first-century event that early Christians connected with Jesus' warnings.

How It Applies To Us Today
† We aren't living in the last days of the Old Covenant. Those days belonged to the first-century generation that witnessed the fulfillment of Christ's warnings and the removal of the former covenant system (Hebrews 1:2; 8:13).
† We don't need to wait for another temple, another priesthood, or another system of sacrifices. Jesus Christ accomplished redemption through His once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12-14).
† We aren't waiting for the kingdom of God to begin. Through Christ, believers belong to the kingdom that cannot be shaken

(Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).
† We have access to the Father through Jesus Christ. The separation represented by the former sanctuary has been overcome through His completed work (Hebrews 10:19-22; Ephesians 2:18).
† We don't need to fear that the physical universe must end for God's promises to be fulfilled. The end of the ages described by Hebrews and Paul concerned the fulfillment of the former covenant age, not the destruction of planet Earth (Hebrews 8:13; Ecclesiastes 1:4).
† We can live with confidence because Christ has established the everlasting covenant. Our relationship with God doesn't depend upon an earthly temple or a future prophetic timetable (Hebrews 13:20-21).
† The message of the end of the ages is a message of fulfillment, not uncertainty. Jesus accomplished what the prophets promised, and His kingdom continues without end (Luke 1:32-33; Hebrews 12:28).

Q & A Appendix
Q: What does the consummation of the ages mean in Hebrews 9:26?
A: It refers to the appointed fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose through Christ. In the fulfilled perspective, it identifies the closing period of the Old Covenant age, not the destruction of the physical universe (Hebrews 8:13; 9:26).
Q: Did Paul say the ends of the ages had already come?
A: Yes. Paul declared that the ends of the ages had come upon himself and the first-century believers receiving his instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11).
Q: Were the last days still future when Hebrews was written?
A: No. Hebrews identifies the time of Christ and the apostles as these last days (Hebrews 1:1-2).
Q: What covenant was becoming obsolete and ready to disappear?
A: The first covenant. The writer specifically identified the Old Covenant as obsolete and approaching its historical

disappearance (Hebrews 8:13).
Q: Did the Old Covenant end when Jesus died or when Jerusalem was destroyed?
A: Christ established the New Covenant through His death. The former covenant became obsolete through His completed work, while the temple system remained until its historical removal in AD 70 (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; 9:15).
Q: Did Jesus identify the generation that would witness the end of the age?
A: Yes. Jesus declared that His own generation wouldn't pass away until all the things He had announced took place (Matthew 24:3, 34).
Q: Does the end of the ages mean the Earth must be destroyed?
A: No. The covenant interpretation understands these passages as describing the completion of the Old Covenant age and the establishment of Christ's everlasting kingdom (Hebrews 8:13; 12:27-28).
Q: Are Christians today waiting for another fulfillment of the end of the ages?
A: No. From the fulfilled perspective, the prophetic conclusion of the Old Covenant age occurred in the first century, culminating in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (Hebrews 9:26; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Matthew 24:34).
Q: What remains after the end of the Old Covenant age?
A: The everlasting New Covenant, Christ's unshakable kingdom, and the believer's access to the Father through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15; 12:28; Ephesians 2:18).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Hebrews 9:26; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:1-2; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:8-10; 1 Peter 1:20; Matthew 24:3, 34; Hebrews 10:37; Hebrews 12:26-28; Hebrews 9:15

† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3; John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew

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