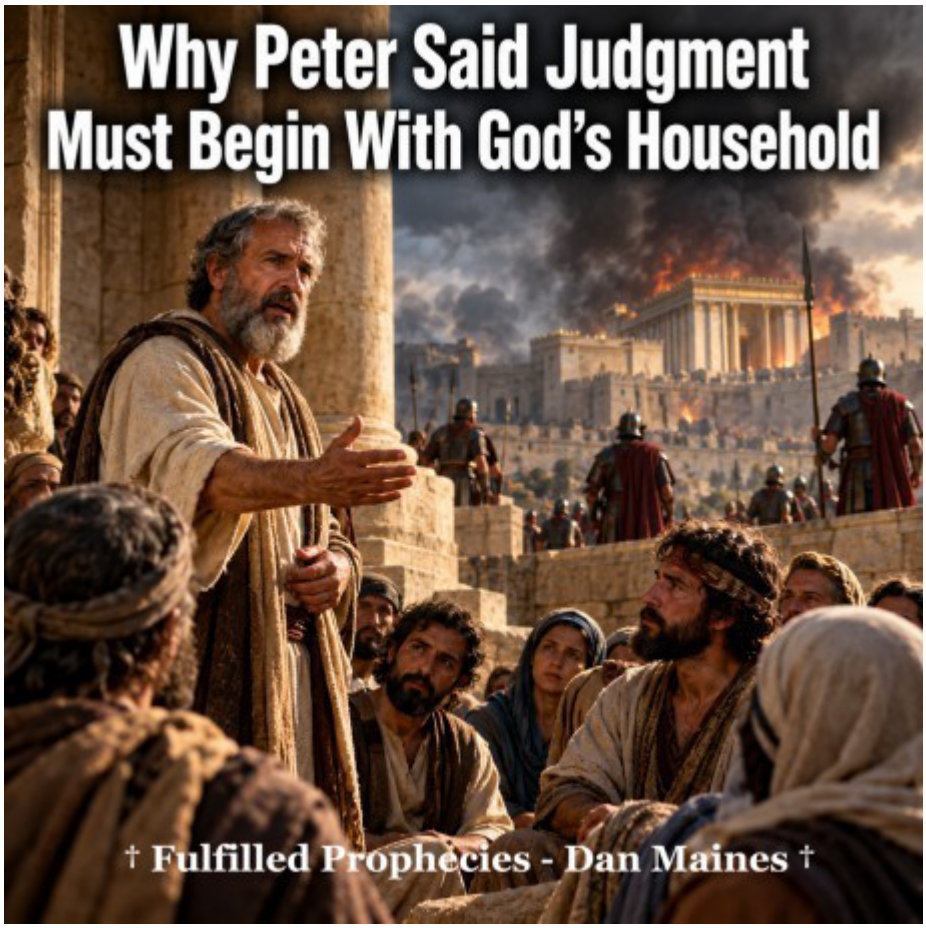
Fulfilled Prophecies

Why Peter Said Judgment Must Begin With God's Household



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† When Peter wrote that judgment must begin with God's household, he wasn't describing a judgment thousands of years in the future. He was addressing Christians living during the final years of the Old Covenant age, when Jerusalem and its temple were approaching their appointed destruction (1 Peter 4:7, 17; Matthew 24:34).

† Peter's warning belongs to the same first-century setting

described by Jesus, Paul, James, and the writer of Hebrews. They all spoke about an approaching judgment, the suffering of God's people, and the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ (Matthew 24:34; James 5:8-9; Hebrews 9:26).
† The judgment Peter described wasn't the destruction of planet Earth. It concerned the approaching end of the Old Covenant order, the testing of God's people, and the judgment of those who rejected the gospel (1 Peter 4:17; Hebrews 8:13).
† To understand Peter correctly, we must examine whom he addressed, what judgment he expected, and why he declared that the time had already arrived (1 Peter 1:1; 4:7, 17).

Peter Was Writing To First-Century Christians
1 Peter 1:1
Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen
† Peter identified his original audience as believers scattered throughout several Roman provinces in Asia Minor. His message was directed to real Christians facing real circumstances during the first century (1 Peter 1:6-7).
† These believers were experiencing persecution, rejection, and suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Peter encouraged them to remain faithful because their trials weren't meaningless (1 Peter 4:12-13).
† We can't remove Peter's warnings from their historical setting and place their fulfillment thousands of years beyond the people who originally received his letter (1 Peter 4:7, 17).
† Peter wasn't writing to describe the end of the physical universe. He was preparing his readers for the approaching judgment associated with the conclusion of the Old Covenant age (Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13).

Peter Said God Was Ready To Judge
1 Peter 4:5
but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

† Notice Peter's language. He didn't say God would become ready thousands of years later. He said God was already ready to judge (1 Peter 4:7).
† The judgment was presented as an approaching reality for Peter's generation, not an event postponed indefinitely into the future (James 5:8-9).
† The living and the dead describe the comprehensive authority of Jesus Christ as Judge. His authority wasn't limited to those physically alive when Peter wrote (Acts 10:42; Romans 14:9).
† Peter's statement must be understood alongside the approaching judgment he identified only two verses later. The immediate context establishes the urgency of his warning (1 Peter 4:7, 17).
† Christ had already received authority to judge, and the first-century believers were living during the appointed period when the Old Covenant age was reaching its conclusion (John 5:22; Hebrews 9:26).

The End Of All Things Was Near
1 Peter 4:7
The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.
† Peter's words couldn't be clearer. The end was near when he wrote his letter. He didn't tell his readers that the end would remain thousands of years away (1 Peter 4:17).
† The expression all things must be understood within the prophetic and covenantal setting. The approaching end concerned the Old Covenant order, not the destruction of the physical creation (Matthew 24:2, 34; Hebrews 8:13).
† Peter connected the approaching end with immediate instructions to his readers. They were to exercise sound judgment, remain sober in spirit, and devote themselves to prayer because the appointed judgment was approaching (1 Peter 4:7).
† If Peter intended an event thousands of years beyond his readers, his declaration that the end was near would lose its natural meaning within the letter (James 5:8-9).

† Jesus had already established the time limitation when He declared that the generation listening to His prophetic warning wouldn't pass away before everything He described took place (Matthew 24:34).
† The end Peter anticipated was fulfilled in the first century, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 (Luke 21:20-22, 32).

Judgment Must Begin With God's Household
1 Peter 4:17
For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?
† Peter didn't say the time for judgment would arrive in some distant generation. He declared that it was already time for judgment to begin (1 Peter 4:7).
† Notice his words, with us first. Peter included himself and the believers of his generation in the approaching judgment and testing (1 Peter 4:12-13).
† God's household included those who belonged to Christ. Peter had already described believers as living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4-5).
† Judgment beginning with God's household didn't mean faithful Christians were condemned with unbelievers. It meant God's people were experiencing testing and suffering before the judgment upon those who rejected the gospel (1 Peter 4:12-19).
† The first-century church was being tested through persecution, suffering, and opposition as the Old Covenant age approached its conclusion (1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-13).
† Peter distinguished between believers undergoing testing and those who refused to obey the gospel. Their outcomes weren't the same (1 Peter 4:17-19).
† The approaching judgment would vindicate Christ and His faithful people while exposing the consequences of rejecting the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:4-7).
† Peter's statement fits the events leading to AD 70, when the Old Covenant temple system was removed and the superiority

of Christ's completed work was historically demonstrated (Matthew 24:2; Hebrews 10:11-14).

God's Judgment Had Previously Begun At His Sanctuary
Ezekiel 9:6
Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary. So they started with the elders who were before the temple.
† Ezekiel established an important Old Testament pattern. When God judged Jerusalem for covenant unfaithfulness, judgment began at His sanctuary (Ezekiel 9:1-7).
† Those who possessed religious authority weren't automatically protected from judgment. Their position increased their responsibility before God (Ezekiel 8:6-18).
† Peter's warning reflects this established principle. God's judgment begins with those who claim to belong to Him, but the faithful and unfaithful don't receive the same outcome (1 Peter 4:17-19).
† Ezekiel's vision originally concerned judgment upon ancient Jerusalem. Peter applied the principle of judgment beginning with God's household to the circumstances facing the first-century church (Ezekiel 9:6; 1 Peter 4:17).
† The connection is significant because Jesus also announced judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple during the generation that heard His warnings (Matthew 23:36-38; 24:2, 34).

The Fiery Trial Was Already Taking Place
1 Peter 4:12
Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;
† Peter wasn't describing a trial that would begin thousands of years later. He specifically identified the fiery ordeal as something already occurring among his readers (1 Peter 4:13-16).
† Their suffering was part of the testing that preceded the

approaching judgment. They were being persecuted because they belonged to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:14-16).
† The fiery ordeal wasn't necessarily literal fire. Peter used the language of testing to describe the severe trials confronting believers (1 Peter 1:6-7).
† The purpose of this testing wasn't to destroy faithful Christians but to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith (1 Peter 1:7).
† The church's suffering and Jerusalem's approaching judgment belonged to the same first-century period, although Peter didn't identify every individual trial with the Roman siege itself (Matthew 24:9-13; 1 Peter 4:12-17).
† Those who remained faithful to Christ could trust God despite the persecution surrounding them (1 Peter 4:19).

The Righteous And The Unbelieving Faced Different Outcomes
1 Peter 4:18
AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?
† Peter contrasted the difficult circumstances experienced by righteous believers with the judgment awaiting those who rejected God (1 Peter 4:17).
† The difficulty didn't mean Christ's sacrifice was insufficient. It described the suffering and testing believers experienced while remaining faithful (1 Peter 1:6-9).
† Their salvation rested upon Jesus Christ, not upon their ability to escape every physical hardship (1 Peter 1:3-5).
† Those who rejected the gospel faced a different outcome because they refused the salvation offered through Christ (1 Peter 4:17; John 3:18).
† The distinction between the faithful and unfaithful was especially important during the first-century judgment upon Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-22).
† Peter encouraged believers to remain faithful because their suffering wasn't evidence that God had abandoned them (1

Peter 4:19).

Jesus Identified The Generation Of Judgment
Matthew 24:34
Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.
† Jesus established the time limitation for the judgment He described. The generation hearing His words would witness the fulfillment of His prophecy (Matthew 24:1-3).
† The disciples had asked about the destruction of the temple, and Jesus explained the events surrounding that approaching catastrophe (Matthew 24:2-3).
† The destruction of Jerusalem wasn't an unrelated historical accident. Jesus had specifically warned that the city and its temple would face judgment (Luke 19:41-44).
† Peter's announcement that the end was near agrees with Jesus' declaration that these events would occur within that generation (1 Peter 4:7; Matthew 24:34).
† The first-century fulfillment doesn't require a second destruction of Jerusalem or another future conclusion to the Old Covenant age (Hebrews 8:13; 9:26).
† Jesus gave the generation, Peter declared the nearness, and history records the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matthew 24:34; 1 Peter 4:7).

Jerusalem's Desolation Was The Fulfillment Of Prophecy
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 vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.
† Jesus identified Jerusalem as the city facing the approaching judgment. He gave His disciples a recognizable sign, the city surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20).

† The warning was directed to people living in Judea who could recognize the danger and flee. It wasn't an instruction for Christians living thousands of years later (Luke 21:21).
† Jesus called these events days of vengeance and connected them directly with the fulfillment of what had been written (Luke 21:22).
† The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 fulfilled this historical warning and brought the temple-centered Old Covenant order to its decisive end (Matthew 24:2; Hebrews 8:13).
† Peter's declaration that judgment had arrived belongs within this same first-century prophetic setting (1 Peter 4:7, 17).
† The physical earth didn't end when Jerusalem was destroyed. The judgment concerned the covenantal order associated with the temple and the rejection of Christ (Hebrews 9:26; 12:22-28).

James Also Declared That Judgment Was Near
James 5:8-9
You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.
Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.
† James used the same language of nearness found in Peter's letter. The coming of the Lord was near, and the Judge was already standing at the door (1 Peter 4:7, 17).
† Both apostles addressed believers experiencing difficult circumstances and encouraged them to remain faithful because God's judgment was approaching (James 5:7-11; 1 Peter 4:12-19).
† James didn't describe a judgment thousands of years beyond his readers. His words communicated urgency to the people receiving his letter (James 5:8-9).
† The agreement between James and Peter strengthens the first-century understanding of these prophetic warnings (Matthew 24:34).
† Their testimony belongs to the same period in which the Old

Covenant order was approaching its removal (Hebrews 8:13).

Christ's Sacrifice Came At The Consummation Of The Ages 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.

† The writer of Hebrews placed Christ's sacrifice at the consummation of the ages. This wasn't a reference to the physical destruction of the universe (Hebrews 8:13).

† Jesus appeared during the final period of the Old Covenant age to accomplish the redemption promised through the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17-18).

† His sacrifice was complete before AD 70, but the temple and its sacrificial system continued operating until Jerusalem's destruction (Hebrews 10:11-14).

† The removal of the temple demonstrated that the former covenantal system had reached its appointed conclusion (Hebrews 8:13).

† Peter's announcement of approaching judgment fits this transition from the Old Covenant order to the fully established New Covenant order (1 Peter 4:7, 17; Hebrews 12:22-28).

† The end of the age wasn't the end of God's kingdom. It marked the removal of the former covenantal order while Christ's kingdom continued (Hebrews 12:28).

The Spiritual Household Replaced The Temple System 1 Peter 2:4-5

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,
you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

† Peter identified Christ as the living stone and believers as living stones being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4-5).

† God's dwelling place was no longer dependent upon the

physical temple in Jerusalem. Through Christ, believers were becoming God's spiritual household (Ephesians 2:19-22).
† This explains why the destruction of the Jerusalem temple didn't destroy God's people or end His kingdom (Hebrews 12:22-28).
† The Old Covenant priesthood and sacrifices had reached their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice was sufficient and final (Hebrews 7:23-28; 10:11-14).
† The church wasn't waiting for another physical temple to restore access to God. Believers already possessed access to the Father through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18).
† God's spiritual household continues because its foundation is Christ, not a building made with human hands (1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20-22).

Historical References
† Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, described the Jewish revolt, the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the terrible suffering experienced during AD 70 in The Jewish War, Books 5-6.
† Josephus recorded famine, internal violence, and widespread destruction during the siege. His account provides historical evidence for the catastrophe Jesus had announced concerning Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24).
† Tacitus, the Roman historian, also described the Jewish revolt and the siege of Jerusalem in Histories, Book 5. His account independently confirms the Roman military setting of the conflict.
† Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, reported that members of the Jerusalem church had relocated to Pella before the city's destruction. His account appears in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5.
† Eusebius' report is later historical testimony rather than a contemporary eyewitness record, but it supports the early Christian tradition that believers escaped Jerusalem before its destruction (Luke 21:20-21).
† These historical writers document the first-century

catastrophe and early Christian understanding of it. The identification of Peter's judgment with the events culminating in AD 70 rests upon the prophetic connections within Scripture (1 Peter 4:7, 17; Matthew 24:34).

How It Applies To Us Today

† Peter's warning had its original prophetic setting in the first century, but its teaching about faithfulness, suffering, and obedience remains valuable for Christians today (1 Peter 4:12-19).

† We aren't waiting for the Old Covenant age to end. That covenantal transition reached its conclusion in the first century, and we now live under the completed work of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:13; 10:11-14).

† We don't need to fear another prophetic destruction of Jerusalem or a future judgment that will bring the Old Covenant system to an end again (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

† Christians can still experience suffering, persecution, and difficult circumstances, but those experiences don't mean Peter's first-century judgment remains unfulfilled (1 Peter 4:12-19).

† God still calls His people to holiness, obedience, prayer, and faithfulness. These responsibilities remain important even though the specific judgment Peter announced has passed (1 Peter 1:15-16; 4:7).

† Our confidence rests in Christ's completed sacrifice and His established kingdom, not in the expectation of another covenantal age-ending event (Hebrews 9:26; 12:28).

† We belong to God's spiritual household, and we have direct access to the Father through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18-22).

† The kingdom isn't waiting to arrive. Christ reigns now, and believers already belong to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-28).

† That's why we proclaim fulfillment rather than postponement. God's promises were fulfilled in Christ, and His kingdom continues without end (Luke 21:22; Hebrews 12:28).

Q & A Appendix

Q: What did Peter mean when he said judgment must begin with God's household?
A: He was describing the testing and suffering already confronting first-century believers as the appointed judgment approached. God's people experienced testing before judgment fell upon those who rejected the gospel (1 Peter 4:12-19).

Q: Was Peter describing the destruction of the physical earth?
A: No. Within the fulfilled perspective, Peter's warning concerned the approaching conclusion of the Old Covenant age, culminating in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 (1 Peter 4:7, 17; Matthew 24:34; Hebrews 8:13).

Q: Why did Peter say it was time for judgment?
A: Because the appointed judgment was approaching during his generation. He described God as ready to judge and declared that the end was near (1 Peter 4:5, 7, 17).

Q: Did judgment beginning with believers mean Christians were condemned?
A: No. Peter distinguished the testing of faithful believers from the outcome awaiting those who rejected the gospel (1 Peter 4:12-19).

Q: Why did Jesus identify Jerusalem as the place of judgment?
A: Jerusalem had rejected God's messengers and the Messiah. Jesus announced that the city and its temple would face judgment within that generation (Matthew 23:34-38; 24:2, 34).

Q: Did the destruction of Jerusalem end God's kingdom?
A: No. The Old Covenant temple system ended, but Christ's kingdom is unshakable and continues forever (Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-28).

Q: Is Peter's judgment still waiting to happen?
A: No. The fulfilled perspective understands Peter's

approaching judgment as belonging to the first-century events culminating in AD 70 (1 Peter 4:7, 17; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Does Peter's teaching still apply to Christians today?
A: Yes. His instruction concerning faithfulness, holiness, prayer, and trusting God during suffering remains valuable, even though the specific prophetic judgment has been fulfilled (1 Peter 1:15-16; 4:7, 19).

Q: Are we waiting for another Day of the Lord to complete the Old Covenant judgment?
A: No. Jesus placed the judgment upon Jerusalem within His own generation, and the Old Covenant age reached its appointed conclusion in the first century (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† 1 Peter 1:1; 1 Peter 4:5, 7, 12, 17-18; Ezekiel 9:6; Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22; James 5:8-9; Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 2:4-5
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 5-6; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5

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