

A.D. 70 and the Final Judgment

Jude 6; Romans 2:5; Acts 17:31

I believe that A.D. 70 marks the official end of the Old Covenant and the official inauguration of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, called The New Covenant in Scripture. We are living in an “age of grace” where we proclaim the forgiveness of sins to all nations through the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, there is looming on the horizon *a terrible final day of judgment*. The world is moving toward a collision course with this final day of reckoning. It is called the great white throne judgment, and this climactic hour of reckoning before God is described in numerous places throughout Scripture. The book of Romans identifies it as “the day of wrath” (Romans 2:5). Jude calls it “the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). Paul says that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). This day is fast approaching—a final judgment day in which God will hold court, and all the world will stand trial before Him. In this final judgment, God will open the books and present His case. Every person without faith in Christ will be judged, and God will announce His just verdict and condemn every sinner to death.

This final courtroom scene is described with dramatic detail in **Revelation 20:11–15**. This is the highest court in heaven or on earth. It is the supreme court of the universe, and there is no higher court of appeal. Every lost sinner will be individually summoned to take his stand before the divine judgment bar, where every unbeliever will have his day in court before the Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence will be presented, and it will be an irrefutable case presented by God Himself. There will be no rebuttal offered, no defense rendered, and no sympathy extended. There will be no grace, no advocate to defend the sinner, and no miscarriage of justice. There will be no successful appeal by the guilty, and no parole from prison as an escape. There will only be holy judgment for sins, and a sentence of death for sinners (the second death).

A.D. 70 Prefigures the Final Judgment

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: *first to the Jew*, then to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16).

The Jew First

In Matt. 10:5 and 15:24, Jesus specifically limits the focus of His earthly ministry to the Jews in Palestine, “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” forbidding His disciples to “go in the way of the Gentiles.” But then at the end of His ministry, He radically redirects His outreach program when He issues the Great Commission: “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19).

Of course, Jesus is not trying one plan, then another, as a hit-or-miss operation. Rather, this two-step understanding is per Old Testament prophetic expectation and is thus His ultimate plan all along.

The Final Judgment in Matt. 25 focuses its particular attention on the long-range, ongoing program of the gospel message through the New Covenant.

Jesus’ standard of evaluation (Matt. 25:37–40) focuses on how the nations will receive Jesus’ missionaries in history.

The Culmination of the New Covenant Age Is the Final Judgment

For Jesus' *current* purpose (New Covenant), the Final Judgment expressly focuses on the Gentiles (plural Gk. *ethnoi*). Thus, the Greek *ethnoi* in Matthew 25:31 refers to "Gentiles." In the Septuagint (LXX), *ethnoi* is commonly applied to the people outside of Israel, people not descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For example, we see this usage of *ethnoi* in Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Exo. 23:27; 33:16; Deut. 7:6–7; Psa. 2:1; Psa. 9:17, 19; 22:27; 110:6; Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:2; Jer. 46:28. This is true in the New Testament as well (Matt. 4:15; 10:5, 18; Mark 10:33, 42; 13:10; Luke 3:32; 21:24; etc.).

Followers of Jesus Are Excluded from the Final Judgment

The reference to "these brothers [Gk. *adelphoi*] of mine" (Matthew 25:40) speaks of Christians, not generically to unbelievers in the world among the "family of man." In fact, Matthew's Gospel speaks of spiritual "brothers" as the Christian community (rather than simply to biological brothers in the nuclear family). Emphatic examples of this derive from Jesus' own words (Matt. 12:48–50; 23:8; 28:10; cp. 18:15, 21, 35). This prevails in other contexts as well (e.g., John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11–12).

More particularly though, this reference to "brothers" in Matt. 25:40 focuses specifically on Christian *missionaries*. The rationale for this understanding is:

- (1) The hunger, thirst, poverty, imprisonment, and so forth speaks of the persecution of believers, the danger of missionary endeavors, which Jesus warns His disciples about (Matt. 10:9–11, 23, 28; Mark 6:9; 13:9–13; 1 Cor. 4:11–12; 2 Cor. 6:4–5; 11:23–27).
- (2) Jesus teaches that those who reject the message of the gospel, which they proclaim, will be subject to judgment (Luke 10:10–15), as in Matthew 25:41, 46. "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (Matt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16; Acts 9:4; 22:7).
- (3) The Gentile mission assumed in Matt. 25 ***parallels in important respects the*** earlier Jewish mission. Here in Matt. 25 Jesus is explicating the Final Judgment. We can compare His standard of judgment here with the similar expectations in the Jewish mission (Matt. 10:14–15; cp. 23:34–36). Thus, both the Jews and the Gentiles will be judged for their response to the Christian message and their reception of the Christian messengers bringing that message.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel there operates a two-stage schema of history: ***the Jewish era and the Gentile era*** (though in each one there will be some of the opposite group involved). For the Jewish message of Christ, He comes to Israel, then He judges Israel for rejecting Him (the A.D. 70 judgment, Matt. 24:2–34).

For the message to the Gentiles, He sends out messengers to them, then judges those who reject them and their message (Matt. 24:36–25:46).

So, the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 prefigures the Final Judgment of unbelievers.

1. Sudden and unexpected.
2. Personal and painful.
3. Death is the end judgment.

Source: Kenneth Gentry, *The Temple's Destruction and A.D. 70 (Part I)*.