New Testament expectations of a first-century Parousia

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Bible Versions

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

Introduction

New Testament (NT) authors, all living and writing prior to AD 70, expected Jesus to return in their near future.[2] And they did so for a very good reason:

Jesus himself, on at least three separate occasions, promised to return before his generation had all passed on. Additionally, much of Jesus' teaching can best be understood within the framework of a first-century Parousia.

In this article we will examine:

1. Jesus' own promises to return in that generation.
2. The expectations of John the Baptist, of Peter and Paul and other NT authors, and of the book of Revelation. We will note that each NT author took Jesus at his word; they all believed he would return in their time.
3. Some of Jesus' teaching and parables to show that these, too, anticipate a first-century Parousia.

My prayer and hope is that Christians of all stripes may come to emulate the apostolic Church in taking Jesus at his word.

[1] Other Bible versions employed:

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[2] NT scholar John A.T. Robinson, in his work *Redating the New Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1976), cogently argues that every NT author wrote prior to AD 70: "One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period — the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and with it the collapse of institutional Judaism based on the temple — is never once mentioned as a past fact. It is, of course, predicted …"
While some of Robinson's dates seem too early or too late, his overriding thesis (of pre-70 authorship) is undoubtedly correct. Robinson's thesis is all the more significant given his liberal theological presuppositions. His thesis can be found online here: http://www.biblemaths.com/redating.pdf. (PDF version prepared by Paul Ingram and Todd Dennis, and edited by Peter Bluer.)

Jesus' promises

Jesus made the following promises on separate occasions:

Matthew 10:23:

"When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Jesus here looks beyond the apostles' immediate mission to their post-Pentecost proclamation of the gospel.
This (later) proclamation will engender fierce persecution from Jews and Gentiles alike (Mt 10:17-18).
There would be an urgency to that mission; when persecuted they should flee to another town, for Jesus will return before they had "gone through all the towns of Israel" (10:23).
(Towns not just in Judaea, but foreign cities with resident Jewish populations as well.)

Matthew 16:27-28:

27 *"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*
28 *Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

Matthew 24:33-34:

33 *"So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*
34 *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."*

This third promise was given in the context of Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 – 25):

- Jesus here is addressing the disciples, responding to their question:
  "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (24:3).
  Jesus had just foretold the coming destruction of Jerusalem's magnificent temple (24:1-2).
  He had earlier pronounced judgment on the city and its religious leaders for their long history of persecution (Mt 23:29-39). Judgment would come upon that very generation (Mt 23:36).
  The disciples wanted to know when the temple's destruction would take place.
  They (correctly) connected its demise with Jesus' coming and with the end of the (then) present age.
  Jesus would come "in his kingdom" (Mt 16:28); he would inaugurate the new (messianic) age, and he would bring judgment on the old order.[3]
- The apostles (and other first-century believers) will be the ones to witness and experience these events:
  YOU (apostles) must resist being led astray (24:4); YOU will hear of wars, famines, and earthquakes (24:6-7);
  YOU will be persecuted (24:9); when YOU see the "abomination" you must flee Judea (24:15-18);
  YOU are not to go after false messiahs (24:23-26); YOU will "see all these things" (24:33).
- Jesus' return will coincide with the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in AD 70.
  See Matthew 24:15-20; Luke 21:20-24.

[3] Concerning "the end of the age" (in Matthew 24:3), William Barclay comments as follows:
"The Jews divided all time into two ages — this present age, and the age to come. The present age is wholly bad and beyond all hope of human reformation. It can be mended only by the direct intervention of God. When God does intervene, the golden age, the age to come, will arrive. But in between the two ages there will come the Day of the Lord, which will be a time of terrible and fearful upheaval, like the birth-pangs of a new age."
From William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957). Via the Bible Portal website: https://bibleportal.com/commentary/section/william-barclay/the-vision-of-things-to-come-matthew-241-31.

- All these things, including Jesus' coming on the clouds (24:30), will transpire before that generation has fully passed (24:34).

In addition to the above three promises, Jesus at his Sanhedrin trial declared the following:

Matthew 26:64:
Jesus said to [Caiaphas], "You have said so. But I tell you [plural], from now on you [plural] will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

How would the Jewish leaders "from now on" see Jesus seated in heaven and coming on the clouds?
Answer: In events soon to transpire, they would begin to perceive that Jesus was truly the One he had claimed to be — that he was now ruling alongside Yahweh and about to judge them.[4]
The following would provide indisputable proof:
Miraculous signs at Pentecost (Ac 2:3-4); the apostles' boldness (Ac 4:13); further signs and wonders (Ac 5:12; 6:8); Stephen's vision (Ac 7:56); the mass-turning of the Gentiles to Israel's God; finally, the calamities to befall their own nation, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem and loss of their temple.
Note that Caiaphas himself did not live to see the Jewish-Roman War (66-70 AD), but several rabbis who were present at Jesus' trial did live to witness these events.

Mark 8:38 – 9:1:
38 *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*
9:1 *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."*

The kingdom came "with power" in AD 70 when Jesus put down his enemies (Rev 11:15-18; cf. Psalm 110). John's final vision in Revelation (chaps. 21 – 22) shows the new (post-70) world order, with the world's nations firmly under the rule and government of Christ (cf. Ps 2:6-9; 72:1-17; Isa 9:7; 11:1-10; etc.).

Mark 13:29-30 (parallels Matthew 24:33-34):
29 *"So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*
30 *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."*

Luke 9:26-27 (parallels Mark 8:38 – 9:1):
26 *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*
27 *But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

Luke 21:31-32 (parallels Matthew 24:33-34):
31 "*So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.*
32 *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place."*

[4] Jesus here is harking back to the Messianic promises of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7:13-14 — he was the One who would rule and judge alongside Yahweh and be granted universal dominion.

John 21:22-23 (my paraphrase):

22 *Jesus said to Peter, "If I want John to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me!"*

23 *Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that John would not die. …*

At the very least this shows that the apostolic Church anticipated a first-century Parousia.

Promises relating to coming judgment

Luke 21:22-23:

22 *"for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.*

23 *… For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people."*

In context Jesus is warning his followers to flee when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Lk 21:20-24). For that will be the time of the Great Tribulation for the Jewish people (cf. Mt 24:21).

Various Old Testament "day of vengeance" and "day of the LORD" prophecies would be definitively fulfilled when Jesus returned.

Luke 23:28-31:

28 *But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*

29 *For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'*

30 *Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'*

31 *For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

Jesus, while being led out for crucifixion, shows his concern for the women of Jerusalem.
He warns of a time when they and their children will call for the mountains and hills to fall upon and hide them.
All this was fulfilled in AD 70 during the Roman siege of the city.
This fulfillment is depicted in Revelation 6:15-17, the context there being the coming war with Rome.

Cautionary note:
Judgment, while focused on Israel (Mt 23:35-38; Lk 21:20-24; 1Thes 2:16; Heb 10:25, 30, 39; Jas 5:1-9), would extend to the nations as well (Mt 25:32; Ac 17:31; Rom 2:5-10; 2Thes 1:5-10; Rev 1:7; 11:18; 22:12).
Before judgment, the gospel would be "proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Mt 24:14), by which is meant the Roman Empire and its surrounds.[5]
Hatred and persecution would be the dominant response (Mt 10:17-23; 24:9).

[5] The Greek word translated "world" in Matthew 24:14 is *oikoumenē* (Strong's G3625), which usually denotes the inhabited or civilized world: the Roman Empire and its surrounds. Note the term's signification in Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; 17:6; 19:27.
The Jews "from every nation under heaven" present at Pentecost came from the nations of the Roman Empire and its immediate surrounds (Ac 2:5, 9-11).
Concerning the first-century gospel proclamation: Through Paul's efforts "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Ac 19:10). Paul himself notes the gospel's remarkable progress in his time (Col 1:6, 23; cf. Rom 1:8; 10:18).
And Adam Clarke notes that, by AD 70, the gospel had been proclaimed not merely in Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, but also "as far north as Scythia; as far south as Ethiopia; as far east as Parthia and India; and as far west as Spain and Britain." From Clarke's *Commentary*, notes for Matthew 24. Via the Bible Hub website: https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/matthew/24.htm.

The basis of judgment would be how one treated Christ's distressed followers (Mt 10:40-42; 25:35ff.).
The Judgment would therefore be limited to those who had heard the gospel in the 1st century.
The nations of the Roman Empire, along with Israel, would be the ones to experience a time of tribulation and wrath (Mt 24:7; Lk 21:35; Rev 3:10).
This — the Judgment of the living — took place for the most part over the years 66-70 AD.

Most of Revelation is concerned with this judgment of the living, but the judgment of the dead was likewise imminent (Revelation 11:18, MEV):
"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time has come for the dead to be judged."

The judgment of the dead took place in AD 70 — before the throne of God in heaven.
See Revelation 20:11-15.

John the Baptist

John spoke of "the coming wrath" that would affect that generation (Mt 3:7, HCSB):
John proclaimed to Israel that:
The axe is ready for use; those not producing good fruit will soon be cut down and incinerated (Mt 3:10).
Messiah will baptize (purify) Israel with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt 3:11; cf. Mal 3:2-3).
He will separate out the wheat but will burn up the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:12; cf. Mal 4:1).

John fulfilled the prophecies of Malachi:
John was the prophesied "Elijah" — the one God had promised to send who would call Israel to repentance (Mal 4:5-6; cf. Mt 11:14; 17:10-13; Lk 1:17). He was also the "messenger" of Malachi 3:1a.
Elijah would be sent "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal 4:5, KJV).
The "day of the LORD" in Malachi 4:5 refers to judgment on God's covenant people, Israel.[6]
If Israel refused to repent, she would suffer the same fate as Edom: total destruction (Mal 4:6; cf. 1:3-4).
Judgment on that nation began with the ministry of Jesus and culminated in the Great Tribulation of 66-70 AD.

[6] Elsewhere in the prophets, the "day of the LORD" refers to Yahweh's judgment on Babylon (Isa 13:6, 9); Egypt (Jer 46:10; Eze 30:3); Israel (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Am 5:18); Edom and other nations (Ob 1:15); various nations (Joel 3:14); Judah (Zeph 1:7, 14). Judgment generally takes the form of foreign invasion. In Joel 1:15 (and probably Joel 2:1, 11) judgment involves a locust invasion. Judgment Day in the New Testament is often called "the day of Christ" (or similar), because he would be the presiding Judge (1Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2Cor 1:14; Php 1:6, 10; 2:16; cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Peter on the day of Pentecost

Acts 2:19-20, 40 (my translation):

19 *"'And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and billows of smoke.*

20 *The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.'"*

40 *With many other words he warned them. He pleaded with them, saying, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation."*

As with John the Baptist, Peter's reference is to the judgment soon to befall Israel.
Peter is quoting from the latter part of Joel 2.
"Blood and fire and billows of smoke" (Ac 2:19) anticipates the nation's fiery end in the War of 66-70 AD.[7]
Peter goes on (in 2:40) to exhort his hearers to be saved from "this perverse generation".
The term "perverse (or "crooked") generation" derives from the Song of Moses — see Deuteronomy 32:5, 20.
There, Moses is both recounting Israel's past ingratitude and anticipating her future apostasy, along with the inevitable outpouring of God's <u>covenant wrath</u>.
(Jesus described his contemporaries in similar terms — see Matthew 12:39; 16:4; 17:17; Mark 8:38.)

Expectations of New Testament authors

Like the gospels and Acts, the NT epistles were written prior to AD 70.
Most NT epistles were written to specific first-century congregations or individuals.
They were not, in the first place, addressed to us twenty-first-century Christians!
As we read these letters, we need to keep in mind that we are really eavesdropping on someone else's mail.
Certainly, from the perspective of the divine author, Scripture was written <u>for us</u> (Rom 15:4; 1Cor 10:11; 2Tim 3:15-16). But it was not written <u>to us</u>.
Sound interpretation demands that we step back, as it were, and consider the first-century context — the specific congregational issues that were being addressed, etc. Only then can we rightly apply the principles of the text to our own situation.
So, when reading through the following Scriptures, keep in mind that they were written to specific first-century audiences. Then note how each author expresses a sense of immanency — important events were soon to transpire that would affect both himself and his readers.

Romans 13:11-12:

11 *Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.*

12 *The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness …*

1 Corinthians 1:7-8:

7 *so that you are not lacking in any gift, <u>as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ</u>,*

8 *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

[7] The Roman army's scorched earth policy led to the burning of crops and entire villages. At the War's conclusion the temple, and the whole of Jerusalem, were consumed by flames.

1 Corinthians 4:5:
Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31:
[29] *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,* [30] *… and those who buy as though they had no goods,* [31] *and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.*

1 Corinthians 15:51:
Behold! I tell you a mystery. <u>We shall not all sleep</u> …

1 Corinthians 16:22 (my translation):
If any man does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Marana tha.

Marana tha is an Aramaic expression in an otherwise Greek epistle.
It's an appeal, probably an early Jewish Christian prayer, for Christ to come again soon: "O Lord, Come."
Such was the expectation of early believers: Jesus was coming soon to judge and to save.

Philippians 1:6, 10 (my translation):
[6] *[I am] convinced of this very thing: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus,*

[10] *so* that *you can discern what is best, in order that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ*.

Philippians 4:5b (HCSB):
The Lord is near.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10:
[9] *… how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,* [10] *and <u>to wait for his Son from heaven</u>, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

Eschatology constitutes a sizeable chunk of the two epistles that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church.
See 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13 – 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:1-12.
That church was founded by Paul following his preaching in the local synagogue, as related in Acts 17:1-9.[8]
During Paul's brief stint in Thessalonica — a few weeks at most — he proclaimed Jesus to be the promised Messiah (Ac 17:3). Further instruction centered around persecution and eschatology (1Thes 3:4; 2Thes 2:5).
The reason for his focus on eschatology, in both his initial preaching and his letters, can be put down to one thing: Jesus' return, and all the events tied to it, would impact the Thessalonians directly.

[8] Paul founded the Thessalonian church ca. AD 50, and his two letters were likely written from Corinth a year or two later.

From what Paul writes, it seems the Thessalonians were particularly concerned that their departed loved ones would miss out on the great events soon to transpire. But Paul assures them that this would not be the case: In fact, the dead in Christ will be raised up first, before the living (1Thes 4:13-18).

1 Thessalonians 4:15:
… we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4-5:
2 *For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*

4 *But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.*
5 *For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.*

2 Thessalonians 1:5-8:
5 *[These persecutions and trials are] evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering —* 6 *since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,* 7 *and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels* 8 *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Jesus' coming would bring relief for his persecuted first-century followers.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 8 (HCSB):
1 *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him: We ask you, brothers,* 2 *not to be easily upset in mind or troubled, either by a spirit or by a message or by a letter as if from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has come.*
3 *Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.*

8 *… and then the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of His mouth and will bring him to nothing with the brightness of His coming.*

Though Jesus' coming was near, it had not yet occurred.
Two signs would precede that coming: a widespread apostasy from the faith (2:3), and the rise of an evil ruler who will claim divine prerogatives and pretend to work miracles (2Thes 2:4, 9).
When Paul wrote (ca. 52 AD), the "man of lawlessness" (i.e., Nero) was not yet ruling; his stepfather, Claudius, stood in the way (2Thes 2:7). When Claudius died suddenly (in October 54 AD) Nero was declared emperor, and his reign continued until the Roman Senate ousted him (in June 68) and he committed suicide.

1 Timothy 6:14 (my translation):
[I charge you, Timothy] to keep this commandment, spotless and above reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 4:1 (my translation):

I solemnly charge you [Timothy] in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is about to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:

Literally: "the [One] being about to judge …"

The Greek term here is *mellontos*, from the verb *mellō* (Strong's G3195).

Mellō properly means: "about" to happen; "ready"; to be "at the very point of" acting.

Especially is this the case when *mellō* is joined to an infinitive (as in this instance).

Bible versions that translate with "about to judge" include the following:

Darby, Mounce, TLV, YLT.

Titus 2:13 (HCSB):

while we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:25 (my translation):

… not giving up our meeting together, as is the habit of some, but exhorting one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The reference here is to the coming judgment of Israel: "The Lord will judge his people" (Heb 10:30).[9]

Jewish believers could already, in the early 60s AD, see signs of their nation's impending war with Rome.

Jerusalem, the temple, its priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies were all about to be swept away (cf. Heb 8:13).

It was therefore futile for them to abandon Christianity for the comfort and safety of institutional Judaism.[10]

Hebrews 10:37 (my translation):

For yet in a very little while, the Coming One will come and will not delay.

According to the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges:

> The original has a very emphatic phrase (μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον) to imply the nearness of Christ's return, "yet but a very very little while."[11]

In view of this emphasis, several Bible versions render the Greek phrase as "a very little while"[12]

Jesus was coming very soon!

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[9] Hebrews 10:30 twice references the Song of Moses (Dt 32:35-36), which, as already noted (on page 6), foretells Israel's future apostasy and the consequent outpouring of God's wrath upon the nation. But note that while Hebrews 10:30 understands Moses to be speaking about judgment, Moses himself (in Deuteronomy 32:36) seems to intend that God will vindicate and show compassion to his chastised and humbled people — quite the opposite sense!

[10] Arthur Pink comments on Hebrews 11:25 as follows:

"There seems little room for doubt that the first reference here is to the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, which was now very nigh, for this epistle was written within less than eight years before Jerusalem was captured by Titus. That terrible catastrophe had been foretold, again and again, by Israel's prophets, and was plainly announced by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21. The approach of that dreadful 'day' could be plainly seen or perceived by those possessing spiritual discernment: the continued refusal of the Nation to repent of their murder of Christ, and the abandoning of Christianity for an apostate Judaism by such large numbers, clearly presaged the bursting of the storm of God's judgment. This very fact supplied an additional motive for genuine Christians to remain faithful. The Lord Jesus promised that His followers should be preserved from the destruction of Jerusalem, but only as they attended to His cautions in Luke 21:8, Luke 21:19, Luke 21:34, etc., only as they persevered in faith and holiness, Matthew 24:13."
Via the StudyLight website: https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/awp/hebrews-10.html.

[11] The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, notes for Hebrews 10. Via the Bible Hub website: https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/hebrews/10.htm.

[12] Including the ASV, AMP, CSB, Darby, DLNT, DRA, GNV, HCSB, LSB, NASB, NMB, NRSV, RGT, WEB.

James 5:7-9:

7 *Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.*
8 *You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*
9 *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

James is writing, for the most part, to groups of Jewish believers living outside of Judaea (Jas 1:1).
His readers were undergoing various trials (Jas 1:2), including persecution and exploitation (Jas 2:6).
This had resulted in worldliness in behavior and factions in their assemblies.
In 5:7-9 James is addressing Christian workers who were being defrauded by wealthy Jewish landowners.
These landowners, James notes, had "laid up treasure in the last days" and "fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter" (Jas 5:3, 5). He is referring to Israel's last days as a nation and to the looming Jewish War in which these landowners would lose everything — their lives as well as their property.[13]
James tells his readers to be patient in view of the Lord's imminent return to judge their oppressors.

1 Peter 1:7, 13 (HCSB):

7 *[These trials have come] so that the genuineness of your faith — more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

13 *Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be serious and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Peter is writing around AD 60 to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

1 Peter 4:5, 7, 12, 17:

5 *… but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

7 *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*

12 *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you.*

17 *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

When Peter wrote, THE Judgment was imminent,[14] along with "the end of all things".
As part of that judgment, his readers were already undergoing a "fiery trial" to prove the genuineness of their faith (cf. 1Pet 1:7).
In Revelation too, judgment begins with the churches (chaps. 2 – 3) before extending to those outside.

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[13] James directly addresses these landowners in 5:1-6. That they were Jewish landowners is evident from the fact that they employed laborers to work their fields. Outside of Jewish circles such work was performed by (unremunerated) slaves.
[14] 1 Peter 4:17 (Greek text): τὸ κρίμα (*to krima*) = THE Judgment. This is an anaphoric article which points the reader back to a judgment already mentioned — that of the living and the dead in 1 Peter 4:5.
The following translations include the definite article: CJB, Darby, DLNT, GW, JUB, LEB, NABRE, NCB, NEB, NOG, YLT.
Compare this with Hebrews 9:27, where the article is absent in the Greek, yet many of our more familiar English versions choose to include it. Translation biases!

1 John 2:18-19 (my translation):

[18] *Little children, <u>it is the last hour</u>. And even as you have heard that antichrist is coming,*
just now many antichrists have appeared. From this we know it is the last hour.
[19] *They went out from us, but they were never really part of us. …*

The presence and subsequent departure of numerous false teachers from the churches proved that the end was very near. These deceivers had, among other things, denied Jesus' Incarnation (1Jn 4:2-3; 2Jn 1:7).

1 John 2:28, 3:2 (HCSB):

[28] *So now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears we may have boldness and*
not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

[3:2] *Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed.*
We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.

John's readers are to remain faithful so that they can be bold and unashamed in Jesus' presence when he comes. To "be like him" probably refers to the saints' vindication and boldness. For when Jesus comes his heavenly glory will be revealed, and his people will (in a limited sense) share his glory as well.

Jude 1:17-19:

[17] *But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
[18] *They said to you, "<u>In the last time</u> there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions."*
[19] *It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*

"Scoffers" had infiltrated the churches, fulfilling certain apostolic "last time" prophecies (Jude 1:4, 18).
They were causing rifts and divisions.
God was coming soon with myriads of his "holy ones" (angels) to judge these imposters (Jude 1:14-15).
God can, and will preserve his people from sin and error and present them "blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy" (Jude 1:24).

From the foregoing Scriptures, it is quite evident that each and every author believed that Jesus would return in their generation.

Imminence in Revelation

John wrote down all that he saw and heard and circulated the scroll to the seven Asian churches (Rev 1:4, 11). All this took place before the onset of Nero's persecution, which started around November 64 AD.

Revelation 1:1a, 3:

[1] *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.*

[3] *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

Revelation is a prophecy of events soon to transpire.
One needs to ask why commentators consistently fail to interpret Revelation as such, given the clarity and repetition of these time statements.

Revelation 2:25 (to Thyatira):
"Only hold fast what you have until I come."

Revelation 3:11 (to Philadelphia):
"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."

Believers in Thyatira and Philadelphia (and implicitly in other first-century churches) were to remain faithful, maintaining their Christian profession until Jesus returned to judge their enemies and deliver them from persecution.
(Recall that the Thessalonian believers were similarly promised relief from persecution at Jesus' coming. See 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8, cited above on page 8.)

Together with 1:1 and 1:3 (above), Revelation 22:6 and 22:10 (below) serve as "bookends" for the entire prophetic content of Revelation. Their meaning is crystal clear.
Therefore, all of John's visions were fulfilled in the 1st century.

Revelation 22:6-7:

[6] … *"And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."*
[7] *"And behold, I am coming soon. …"*

Revelation 22:10:

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

This is the opposite of what the angel had instructed Daniel to do some 600 years earlier:
"But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4)

Daniel's prophecies concerned the distant future: the "latter days" and "time of the end" (2:28; 8:17, 19; 10:14; 11:40; 12:4, 9), the messianic kingdom (2:44-45; 7:13-27), and the Resurrection (12:2-3).
Also, what would happen to Israel in the latter days (10:14) — the nation's destruction (12:7; cf. Dan 9:26b).

Concerning this sealing (in Daniel 12:4) Kurt Simmons notes:
"The message was to remain unclear and obscure until the time neared for its fulfillment."[15]

John's visions concerned those same events that Daniel had foretold, but now the time for fulfillment was imminent — accordingly, John's prophecies were not to be sealed up.

Revelation 22:11-12 (my translation):
11 *"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him still practice righteousness; and he who is holy, let him be holy still."*
12 *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each person according to his work."*

The judgment of both Jews and Gentiles — of those to whom the gospel had been proclaimed — was imminent. In fact, judgment was so near that (to all intents) it was already too late to change one's life and alter the verdict.

Revelation 22:20:
He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Jesus' promises to come "soon" in Revelation (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20) complement his promises recorded in the gospels. There is no way such statements can be expanded to include 20 centuries of history.

[15] Kurt M. Simmons, *Adumbrations* (Carlsbad, NM: Biblical Publishing Company, 2009), p. 296.

Jesus' Parables and Teaching

Jesus' parables, and some of his teaching, are best understood within the framework of a first-century Parousia.

The Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)
For a time, the "sons of the kingdom" will co-exist with the wicked (13:38).
At "the end of the age" (13:39-40) the wicked will be gathered out of the kingdom and incinerated (13:41-42).[16]
The righteous will be gathered into Jesus' "barn" (13:30).
They will "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (13:43).

The Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50) has a similar significance.
The Net (= the kingdom) gathers both good fish and bad.
At "the end of the age" the wicked will be separated out and incinerated (13:49-50).

Both parables should be related to the judgment that Malachi and John the Baptist foretold:
"The great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Mal 4:5, KJV) refers to a time of covenant wrath when the good and the bad in Israel would be clearly distinguished, with the latter incinerated (Mal 3:2-5; 3:18 – 4:6; Mt 3:7-12).

In AD 70, Christians were definitively gathered into God's kingdom (Mt 3:12; 13:30; 24:31; 2Thes 2:1).[17]
During the Tribulation (66-70 AD) many unbelieving Jews perished and entered into eternal punishment.
Those that survived were shut out from God's eternal New Covenant kingdom (Mt 8:11-12; 21:43; 25:11-12).

Repent or Perish (Luke 13:1-9)
"But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (13:3, 5).
The parable that follows — that of **The Unfruitful Fig Tree** (13:6-9) — shows that Jesus is speaking of Israel:
Though delayed, judgment will inevitably befall the unfruitful nation.
Jesus' later cursing of the fig tree is also to be viewed in this light — as pertaining to Israel (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21).
The prophesied judgment relates to the events of 66-70 AD.

The Narrow Door (Luke 13:23-30)
In the 66-70 AD Judgment, unbelieving Jews — in whose streets Jesus taught and with whom he ate (13:26) — were finally shut out of God's New Covenant kingdom, while Gentile believers were admitted.

The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)
Jesus is here encouraging his followers to persevere in the trials that would precede his coming.
This presupposes a time of general injustice and persecution for Christians.
In response to their prayers, Jesus will come "speedily" to grant them relief.
(Compare with James 5:4, 7-9.)

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[16] For the meaning of "the end of the age", see footnote 2.
[17] Matthew 24:31 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 probably refer to the spiritual gathering of living believers into Christ's kingdom in AD 70.
The gatherings of the "wheat" into the "barn" in Matthew 3:12 and in 13:30 perhaps refer to this gathering as well.
Alternatively the barn might denote heaven, with the gathering referring to the many Christians who entered heaven via martyrdom and resurrection around that time. Entry into heaven is perhaps suggested by Matthew 13:43 (cf. Daniel 12:2-3).
Support for this (barn = heaven) interpretation may be found in the double harvest described in Revelation 14:
John first sees Jesus, seated on a cloud, harvesting the Jewish martyrs into Paradise (14:14-16).
He subsequently sees a harvesting of unbelieving Jews into God's "great winepress" for judgment (14:17-20).

The Parable of the Ten Minas (Luke 19:12-27)

Jesus gave this parable to explain how he would return to reign only after a lengthy absence.
He would first leave for a distant country (= heaven) to receive his kingdom (19:12).
Prior to leaving he would commission his servants to work for his cause during his absence (19:13).
Upon his return the faithful will share with their Lord in the administration of the kingdom (19:16-19).
But his enemies who rejected his rule will be executed (19:14, 27).
Note that Jesus returns to the same servants whom he commissioned when he left.
Likewise, the same enemies who sent a delegation opposing his rule are executed upon his return.
The latter reference is to the Jews who perished in the Jewish-Roman War and in the 70 AD siege of Jerusalem.

The Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-45)

The vineyard represents Israel, and the farmers who rent it are the nation's leaders.
These leaders mistreated God's prophets and finally killed God's Son.
What will the owner do?
Answer: He will execute those leaders and hand over the "kingdom of God" to others (21:41, 43).
The Jewish leaders understood Jesus as referring to them (21:45).
Jesus warns them that in rejecting him they were fulfilling God's predestinating purposes: "this was the Lord's doing" (21:42, citing Psalm 118:22-23; cf. Mt 21:44; Isa 8:14-15; 28:16; 1Pet 2:4-8).

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14)

As heirs of the promises made to their forefathers, the Jews were the first to be invited to honor God's Son (22:2). But they refused (22:3).
Further appeals aroused open hostility and persecution (22:4-6).
"The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and <u>burned their city</u>." (22:7)
Yet their rejection paved the way for the Gentiles to be called and admitted into the kingdom.
In AD 70 Jerusalem and its temple were burned by the Roman army. Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 22:7 and 23:34-38 were thereby fulfilled.[18]

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

Jesus here warns his first-century followers to be constantly alert and ready for his return (25:13).
There was a real risk of being shut out of his kingdom (25:11-12).
Jesus would return when least expected — <u>like a thief</u> (Mt 24:42-44; Lk 12:35-40):

- Jewish believers will need to flee Jerusalem immediately when they see the approaching Roman army, lest they be caught up in the city's judgment (Mt 24:16ff.; Lk 21:20ff.).
- The Thessalonians needed to be alert and sober because Judgment Day would come to the unsuspecting "like a thief in the night" (1Thes 5:2-9).
- The Christians in Sardis needed to wake up because Jesus was about to come "like a thief" to judge them (Rev 3:1-3).
- Everyone needed to be alert because judgment was coming — "suddenly like a trap" (Lk 21:34-36).

Jesus was coming to judge, first the churches (1Pet 4:17; Revelation 2 – 3), then the nations and peoples of the Roman Empire. And he would do so when least expected.

[18] In Revelation, judgment comes upon the Harlot City (= Jerusalem) via the Roman Beast and horns who "burn her up with fire" (Rev 17:16). Her destruction by fire is explicitly noted to be God's judgment (Rev 18:8).

Appendix: What Now?

If Jesus' Second Coming and the Judgment occurred in the events of 66-70 AD, how are we to view the future? The Bible suggests that the world will continue for a long time and that, through the gospel, Christ will win all nations to himself. Consider the following:

Psalm 2:8 (HCSB; The Lord's decree to his anointed King):
"Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance and the ends of the earth Your possession."

Isaiah 2:2-4:
2 *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,*
3 *and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*
4 *He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

The gospel was to be proclaimed to the nations starting from Jerusalem — see Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8.

Isaiah 9:7:
Of the increase of his government and of peace <u>there will be no end</u>, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

Isaiah 11:9:
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Daniel 7:14:
And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; <u>his dominion is an everlasting dominion</u>, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Luke 1:33 (The angel Gabriel to Mary):
"And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and <u>of his kingdom there will be no end</u>."

Revelation 11:15 (MEV):
The seventh angel sounded [his trumpet], and there were loud voices in heaven, saying: "The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and <u>He shall reign forever and ever</u>."

God's kingdom is a present reality, and it will continue to grow and influence the world for good:

- The "Son of Man" entered heaven on the clouds to be invested with universal authority (Dan 7:13-14; Ac 1:9).
- His first-century judgments demonstrated that he was enthroned with the Father (Mt 26:64; Rev 1:7).
- He is enthroned in the heavenly Zion (Ps 2:6; 110:1-2).
- In this way, David's throne and kingdom have been restored (Isa 9:7; Lk 1:32-33; Ac 2:30-36; 15:16-17).
- The gospel is "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43; 8:1; 16:16).
  It's the proclamation that, through Jesus, God's kingdom has finally come (Ac 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).
- Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom have been, and are being, fulfilled (Psalm 72; Isa 11:1-10; Mt 4:17; Mk 9:1; Lk 21:31; Rev 11:15).
- All nations belong to Jesus, and in time all will be won for him (Gen 12:3; Ps 2:8-9; 72:17; 86:9; Mt 28:18-19; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8; Rev 11:15; 15:4).

Therefore, God's eternal and universal kingdom is already here.
It's a present reality.
It will grow to fill the whole world.
And we Christians are here for the long-haul.