

The Prophetic Judgment of Old Covenant Israel – Matt 24:1-44 (Part 1)

The Gospel Age of Hope - #11

Introduction – Some people, confused by all the arguments over biblical prophecy, conclude that the prophetic portions of Scripture are too difficult for their own personal study and simply avoid those sections of the Bible. However, it is estimated that over 25% of the Scriptures are made up of prophetic material and so unless we are satisfied to relegate that much of the Word to obscurity, we have to learn how to study these passages. While we have not had Biblical Prophecy conferences, in preaching through books of the Bible, we have often handled prophetic passages before. And this series has been designed to equip us to understand how Scripture teaches us to handle all of Scripture. If we take this approach (i.e. always reading in context and letting Scripture show us how to interpret passages with Scripture) we will find that passages such as Matthew 24 are not as confusing as they are made out by some to be.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem: The Context (Matt 21-23) – Matt 24 takes place in the week of the Passion of Christ. Jesus enters into Jerusalem (21:1-11), goes into the temple and makes a mess (21:12-17). This “cleansing” is followed by the lesson of the hypocritical fig tree (21:18-22) which is obviously a prophecy about Israel. The parables of the Two Sons, the Wicked Vinedressers, and the Unresponsive Wedding Guests (21:28 – 22:14) all point to Israel’s refusal to acknowledge, submit, and obey Jesus (and note 22:7). Multiple questions are asked of Jesus revealing Israel’s teachers’ lack of knowledge of the kingdom of God and the King (22:15-46) all leading up to a condemnation upon that present generation’s shepherds of Israel (23:1-36, esp. v36), and as Jesus leaves the city, He laments over her (23:37-39, esp. v38). We must conclude that the whole context of teaching is centered on the rejection of the Messiah and the consequential judgment upon Israel in her unbelief.

Do You Not See All These Things? (Matt 24:1-2) – Jesus left the temple (leaving it desolate) and would never again return to it until He returned in judgment. His disciples, however, still think that this temple is the home of the Messiah, and so point out all of its glory. Jesus then makes clear His prophecy (v2) – not one stone will be left here upon another. This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 AD by Titus, the then Roman general who led the siege of Jerusalem and ordered the walls of the city and those of the temple to be demolished. Jesus’ question, “*do you not see all these things*” is not simply to what their eyes see, but to the events and discussions that took place in Matt 21-23 up to this point.

Two Questions on the Mount (v3) – It has become common to take these two questions as detached and unrelated questions: “When will this happen (the Temple destruction)” and “when will a bunch of other things take place (at a different time far, far in the future)?” But if we keep the context in mind we see that it is far more natural to take their questions as relating to the same series of events. Two objections to this concern the phrases, “Your coming” and “the end of the age.”

“The Sign of Your Coming” – Some believe that any time Jesus refers to His coming it must refer to His physical return, His Second Coming. But that simply is not the case of Scripture. Isaiah 19:1 refers to a coming of the Lord upon Egypt in judgment and Micah 1:1-4 warns of the Lord’s coming in judgment upon Samaria and Judah. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself warns through John that He will come in judgment upon the church in Ephesus and remove their lampstand (Rev 2:5), and upon the church in Pergamos (Rev 2:16). The Lord comes frequently in judgment; it is not alien at all in scripture to speak of God or the Lord coming in judgment.

“The End of the Age” – The phrase is sometimes wrongly translated, “end of the world.” The age they are asking about is the age connected to the context; the glorious temple, its sacrificial system, the house for God. The age of old covenant types and shadows was coming to an end and the new covenant age was about to be inaugurated.

Placing the Prophecy (Matt 24:34) – We will deal with the details of Matt 24 later, but for now, we can see how Jesus places the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy and the answer to the disciples’ questions. “*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*” Every other time “*this generation*” is used in the NT it clearly and simply means the people that are living at that time. The context of Matt 21-24 only confirms that Jesus is referring to the same here. The only reason one begins to redefine “this generation” to mean some group of people in the far, far distant future (or our present generation) is because of an imposed eschatology on the text and because of the supposed difficulties of understanding Matt 24:4ff as having taken place before 70 AD. We’ll consider those “difficulties” next time. For now, consider a simple, straightforward reading of this verse.

Real Judgment – In conclusion, let us remember that we worship a God who does come in judgment upon unbelieving, rebellious and hypocritical nations and people. While we do not preach that we think we are about to enter into the Great Tribulation, that is not to say we may not find ourselves under the “*coming of the Lord*” in judgment in our day. To be optimistic overall about the work of the kingdom of God is not to gloss over the terrible woes He brings upon those when His longsuffering has come to an end, as it has upon many nations and empires. Our only hope as a nation is to repent and call upon the name of Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

A Real Temple – And in conclusion, we must never forget that while Jesus prophesied that Herod’s temple would be destroyed, He also prophesied that the temple of His body would be killed and raised to new life. We are that temple if we are in Jesus Christ, united to Him in His life and death. As glorious as that temple may have been, we are being changed from glory to glory now as His people as we worship and serve Him.

That temple was razed, that we might be raised as the new temple, a temple of living stones.