

The Signs in *Their* Times – Matt 24:1-44 (Part 2)

The Gospel Age of Hope - #12

Introduction – In our last sermon, we saw that the context of Matt 21-23, along with the explicit teaching of 24:34 teaches us *why* we are to understand this passage to be a prophecy of that which would happen to Jerusalem and the Temple in the first century. Jesus was speaking specifically of *the end of the age* of the Old Covenant era; those would be its *last days*. Now we will look at *how* this passage was fulfilled in that time period. In so doing, we will see that this prophecy was one of many that authenticated Jesus Christ as the true Prophet of God. It would also be the sign that God had divorced Israel, removing Himself from her midst, and giving His kingdom to another nation (Matt 21:43).

When and What? (vv1-3) – The disciples were not asking about the end of the world, but of the end of the age; an age whose end would come through the destruction of the temple and the holy city, Jerusalem.

Matt 24:34 – *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”* – How were the prophecies fulfilled during the generation to which Jesus was speaking?

Precursory Signs (vv4-13) – The beginning events Jesus first mentions are false messiahs (v5), wars (vv6-7), and natural disasters (v7). These are commonly sited as signs of the end, which is strange because Jesus explicitly states that they are not signs of the end, but of the beginning. In addition, Jesus predicted a great tribulation against the disciples, which the book of Acts records. History teaches that all the apostles were martyred with the exception of John. John and Paul both teach of great apostasies in their days. Jesus warned that great religious, social, and political upheavals would engulf the first-century church, but *“those who endure to the end”* would be saved from the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. Josephus records that all of the Christians fled Jerusalem before the final siege in 68AD.

Witness to the World (v14) – At first glance, this seems impossible. However, first note this is not the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) where the nations would be discipled. Was the gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world in the first century? Let the Bible answer the question – Col 1:6, 23, Acts 2:5, Rom 1:8.

Abomination of Desolation (vv15-18) – Christ is referring to Dan 9:26-27 which prophesies the coming of armies to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and is made particularly clear in the parallel passage in Luke (21:20-22).

The Great Tribulation (vv19-22) – Josephus left us an eyewitness record of much of the horror of those years (AD68-70); it was a time when “the day-time was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear,” when the whole land “was all over filled with fire and blood”; when the lakes and seas turned red; when the Roman soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them – at a rate of 500 per day. Over a million Jews were slaughtered and tens of thousands were captured and carried away into slavery.

No Personal Coming (vv23-28) – In the midst of the great tribulation upon Jerusalem, many would take advantage of the panic and claim to be the Messiah, as Josephus records happened. But there would be no personal appearance of Jesus in that way then. His coming would be like lightning, a regular OT symbol of destructive power (i.e. 2 Sam 22:15, Psalm 78:48-49, Ezek 21:10). Jerusalem is a dead carcass, and there the eagles (or vultures) will gather.

The Coming of the Son of Man (vv29-31) – Such strong, vivid language leaves the reader thinking that Jesus must be referring to His Second Coming at the end of the world. But Jesus is quoting Isaiah 13:10, a judgment upon Babylon. Similar language is used in judgment upon Idumea (Is 34:3-5), Egypt (Ezek 32:7-8), and Israel (Joel 2:28-32). The point of verse 29 is that the lights are going out on Jerusalem and the Temple; its days and powers were over. Verse 30 should be translated, *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven...”* The sign is of the Son of Man in heaven, coming in the clouds of glory, a reference to Dan 7:13. Jesus concludes: the shackles of Judaism were completely destroyed, messengers would be sent to the world, and a New Elect would be gathered in to a New Temple (v31); the Gospel Age of Hope.

A Lesson from the Fig Tree (vv32-35) – These events leading up to this judgment and this transition period would cause great confusion and discouragement in the hearts of the true followers of Christ. But Jesus points them to the hope (as Luke records as well in 20:28). Summer, a time of fertility, growth, and fruit, was figurative of the kingdom of God. Judaism removed, the Messiah's kingdom would find fertile soil throughout the world to the glory of God. And as He vowed (vv34-35) all these things took place within the course of one generation.

Left Behind (vv36-44) – And so there is no reason to take this section as referring to a contemporary Rapture in our day (see also the parallel passage in Luke 17:22-37). A week later this city would crucify the Son of God and go on their merry way, as in Noah's day. In their unbelief, they would never expect Jesus to bring forth His terrible wrath upon them. In Luke, the question is asked where those who are gathered up are gathered to, and Luke (17:37) uses the same phrase Matthew recorded in 24:28 – they are gathered to a place of judgment. The epistles of the New Testament are full of the *“watching”* commanded by Jesus (vv42-44) for they believed His word for their generation.