

Matthew 24:1-35 Olivet Discourse: When Will the Temple Be Destroyed? Aug 30, 2015
Daniel 9
Psalm 100

Daniel was told that 70 weeks – or 70 “sevens” –
“are decreed about your people and your holy city,
to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity,
to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet,
and to anoint a most holy place.”

Tonight we will look at Jeremiah’s prophecy
that the Babylonian captivity would last for 70 years
(believe it or not, I *did not* plan this!) –
but Daniel is now told that there will be 70 “7s”

There will be a decree to rebuild Jerusalem.
(there are several decrees that might fit – one in 538 for the rebuilding of the temple,
another in 458 for provisions for the temple,
another in 445 for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem)
Then there will be 7 sevens (perhaps 49 years?) until the coming of an anointed prince.
Then there will be 62 sevens (434 years?) until an anointed prince is cut off.
Then there will be a final seven (7 years?) until the end.

It is *really* interesting that 490 years from 458 BC is 33 AD.
Of course, there are some challenges in figuring out what the final seven years means.
And it seems likely that the author of the book of Daniel
is *thinking* of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt.
(The description later in Daniel 11 about the “abomination that causes desolation”
sure sounds like Antiochus!)
But Jesus says that this is about him.
After all, *all* of Israel’s history is about him!

As we’ve seen throughout Matthew’s gospel
when Matthew talks about “fulfilling” the Old Testament,
he doesn’t mean “this was intended as a prediction about Jesus.”
Rather, Matthew is keying off of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount:
“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
The life and teaching of Jesus is *constantly* fulfilling the Old Testament.
Everything in the OT points to him.

And for this we give thanks!
Psalm 100 is called “a psalm for giving thanks”

Sing Psalm 100
Read Matthew 24:1-35

Why is the temple so important?

Jesus is about to go to the cross.

Jesus is about to do the most important thing in all of human history,
and Matthew gives us two *long* chapters
that focus on this exchange that starts when Jesus says,
“Yeah, this temple is about to be utterly destroyed.”

Too often, NT scholars approach the gospels solely with the “historical” question:
what would the disciples have known at the time that they spoke with Jesus?

But of course, Matthew’s gospel was not *written* at the time that they spoke with Jesus.

Matthew’s gospel is written by Matthew *more than a decade later*.

Matthew’s point is that after Jesus left the temple,

Jesus told his disciples that the temple would be destroyed,
and the disciples became curious and asked when.

But Matthew tells the story years later.

He remembers the teaching of Jesus accurately –
but he’s told this story many times over the intervening years.
And as he has preached on the teaching of Jesus,
he has come to understand more and more deeply what Jesus had meant.

This is why you see so many subtle differences between the four gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not just writing down historical facts.

They were preaching sermons based on the life and teaching of Jesus.

They are faithful sermons that accurately report who Jesus was and what Jesus said.

But they are speaking to the church in their day

(which is fundamentally the same as the church in our day!)

and they are telling us what *we* need to hear and believe and do.

Introduction: Why Is the Temple So Important? (24:1-3)

a. Jesus Left the Temple (v1-2)

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

For the last three chapters, ever since his triumphal entry,

Jesus has been teaching in the temple.

The contrast between the expected kingdom of the Pharisees
and the true kingdom of Jesus
could not be more stark!

In the words of the apostle John,

“he came to his own place, but his own people did not receive him.”

The temple *should* have been the place that received him.

But the leaders of the temple rejected Jesus.
And so now the temple has come under judgment.

And so the disciples approach him privately to ask him to explain:

b. A Question in Two Parts (v3)

³ *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*

The question itself, in verse 3, distinguishes between a “near event” and a distant event:
“when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming
and of the close of the age.”

In verses 4-35, Jesus focuses on “those days” and “these things” –
as he answers their question about the destruction of the temple.

Then in 24:36-25:46, Jesus focuses on *that day* and the end of the age –
as he deals with the question about the close of the age.

I highly commend the ESV in verse 3.

The disciples ask about the “close of the age.”

Then in verses 6 and 14, Jesus will speak of the “end.”

The word translated “end” is a different word than the word translated “close.”

So in our passage for today, Jesus is *not* talking about the “close of the age” –
but the end of the temple.

In this response, Jesus is teaching his disciples to see a parallel between these two events.

The temple was symbolic of this age.

Therefore, the destruction of the temple is symbolic of the destruction of this age.

Hebrews 9:8 says that the high priest’s entrance into the most holy place
once a year – year after year –

“indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened
as long as the first section [of the temple] is still standing
(which is symbolic for the present age).”

So Hebrews 9 says that the first section of the holy place is symbolic of the present age.
The holy of holies is symbolic of the age to come.

That may sound strange – so let me explain!

The tabernacle (and later the temple) was designed with two parts:

The first part, the holy place, was where the priests went every day
to do their ordinary sacrificial work
and offer incense before the LORD.

The second part, the most holy place, was separated by a curtain (or veil).
Behind the veil was the ark of the covenant,
with the golden cherubim protecting the holy presence of God.

Only the high priest was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies –
and he was only allowed to go once a year on the Day of Atonement
bringing the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy seat.

Hebrews says that the two sections of the tabernacle reflect the two ages of history:
this present age (the world as it is in Adam, in our estate of sin and misery),
and the age to come (the world as it is in Christ, in our estate of redemption).

So what the High Priest did once each year on the Day of Atonement
was pass from this age (the Holy Place)
into the age to come (the Most Holy Place).

Every year, once a year, the high priest came forward in time (symbolically)
anticipating the work of Christ—and pointing to his once-for-all sacrifice.

So the temple was the place where this age meets the age to come –
the place where earth and heaven meet.

And that is why from the standpoint of fallen, sinful humanity,
the Mosaic Covenant was a picture of salvation –
a picture of the age to come.
Israel gathered around the temple –
longing for the day when they could go into the Most Holy Place

But from the standpoint of the coming of Jesus –
the Mosaic Covenant symbolized death –
a picture of the present age of failure.
The church gathers around Jesus, our High Priest, in the Most Holy Place –
and when we look back at the Law, we see the failures of “this age.”

Once you are in the Most Holy Place in the presence of God himself,
why would you want to go back?

The earthly temple was once the picture of the age to come.
But now that the age to come has dawned in Jesus,
the temple becomes symbolic of this present age.

And so the destruction of the temple becomes a sign of the close of the age!

So, in verses 4-35, Jesus is answering part one of the disciples’ question:
essentially, Jesus is explaining, “here is when the temple will be destroyed.”
He gives a series of five episodes in clear order
so that anyone and everyone can know what to expect .
In verse 36, Jesus will say that as for *part two* of their question,
no one knows – except the Father – when the close of the age will come.

First, in verses 4-8, Jesus describes the beginning of the birth pains –

1. War, Famine, and Earthquake: the Beginning of the Birth Pains (v4-8)

⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

The description in verses 4-8 is not very precise.

But then again, wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes –
these happen *all the time*.

They happened in the first century – they happened last summer.

And Jesus says do not be surprised or alarmed by this.

This is just ordinary life in this age.

You often hear people say that “things are so bad now, *we have to be close to the end.*”

Jesus specifically tells us that “this must take place, but the end is not yet.”

These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Birth pains.

That’s an interesting image!

Isaiah had described the Day of the LORD against Babylon in Isaiah 13 –

as a day of destruction – the final judgment against the earth –

“Pangs and agony will seize them;

they will be in anguish like a woman in labor” (13:8).

Isaiah and Jeremiah use this image quite a bit!

Most women will tell you that there are very few pains that are worse than the pain of childbirth.

And yet, they are willing to do this in order to bring forth a child.

Pain in childbirth is a part of the curse in Genesis 3.

Further, pain in childbirth is a part of the curse that is unique to women.

And, as we saw when we went through the creation of Eve in Genesis 2,

Eve is *constructed* from Adam’s side –

using a lot of building terms that also are used

in the building of the temple in Solomon’s day.

The holiness code in Leviticus treats the female body as “sacred space.”

And the church is not only referred to as the “bride of Christ” –

but also as the “mother” of believers.

Temple and Bride and Mother all come together in the church.

So when Jesus uses the language of “birth pains” here in Matthew 24

regarding the coming destruction of the second temple.

he is using language that connects to the prophetic description

of the destruction of the *first* temple.

But it's important to recognize that these pains are *not* pointless!
There is a birth that will come at the end of the pain!
There is a reason why this is happening!

Then in verses 9-14, Jesus describes what will happen to his disciples:

2. Tribulation and the Gospel of the Kingdom: the Importance of Endurance (v9-14)

⁹ *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away^[a] and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

You often hear people say that when you look at how Christians are being treated,
the end has to be close now!

But again, Jesus says that all of this was supposed to happen in the first century!

Jesus is talking about what will happen before the temple is destroyed.

(Of course, since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD

is a picture of the end of this age –

we shouldn't be surprised that the rest of “this age” matches the picture!)

But Jesus says that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

We know from the book of Acts that it was preached

in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

We know from the epistles that many false prophets arose and led many astray.

We know that the apostles endured tribulation and were put to death.

But Jesus promised that “the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

And that promise is just as true today as it was for the apostles.

Then in verses 15-28, Jesus gives the next step.

After the apostles suffer (and many of them die),

then will come the “abomination of desolation.”

3. The Abomination of Desolation: Do Not Be Deceived (v15-28)

¹⁵ *“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead*

astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ *See, I have told you beforehand.* ²⁶ *So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.* ²⁷ *For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* ²⁸ *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

In verse 15, we are reminded of Matthew's presence as an author:

"let the reader understand"!

In other words, Matthew does not expect that Jesus' original hearers would have understood this, but we who have the advantage of hindsight can understand what Jesus is really saying.

Matthew is telling us that the temple is going to be destroyed –
but that we should not confuse the destruction of the temple
with the close of the age.

The abomination of desolation in the prophet Daniel refers to the desecration of the temple.

In Daniel 11:31, we hear a detailed description of the abomination of desolation.

It includes profaning the temple, taking away the regular burnt offering,
and the setting up of this "abomination that makes desolate."

It fits nicely what Antiochus Epiphanes did in the 2nd century BC.

But Jesus says that *this too* was finally about *him*.

The whole history of Israel is retold, recapitulated, in Jesus.

And now Jesus says that the *next* abomination of desolation is going to come.

And when it comes, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

At the beginning of the 4th century, the early Christian historian, Eusebius

tells us that during the Jewish revolt of 67 AD,

early Christian prophets warned the church in Jerusalem

that this was what Jesus had warned them about.

And so when the Roman army arrived at Jerusalem, all the Christians had fled.

But here's where it gets interesting.

You would think that if Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple,

he would spend a lot of time talking about the temple,

or the priests – or the Jews, for that matter!

But he doesn't.

Jesus is interested in the destruction of the temple –

not because of what it says about "those naughty Jews" –

but because of what it will mean for his disciples!

After all, because of what Jesus does in his death and resurrection,

his disciples will become the temple!

The destruction of the earthly temple becomes almost a sideshow

compared to the tribulation that comes upon the disciples as they flee Jerusalem.

From their question, the disciples plainly thought that the destruction of the temple
would surely be accompanied by the close of the age.

But Jesus says that the abomination of desolation – the defilement of the temple – would not bring an end to persecution and tribulation. Indeed, “then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Again, remember that the temple is a picture – a microcosm – of this age. The destruction of the temple is a picture of the destruction of this age. Therefore, if God destroys the temple, *and keeps going*, he will destroy the whole earth. “If those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved.”

Not just no Jew – or no Christian – but *no human being*.

Truly the destruction of the temple is a *picture* of the destruction of this age!

And Jesus again warns his disciples not to get taken in by people claiming to be the Christ. Jesus will return! But not yet. Don’t get taken in by people claiming “I am he.” The Coming of the Son of Man will be “as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west.” In other words, it will be *really obvious!*

The word “coming” (in verse 27) is the word *parousia*. It is used in verse 3 in the question of the disciples about the sign of his coming. And then it is used here in verse 27 to say that this is *not* the coming (not the *parousia*). And then it is used in verses 37 and 39 to speak of *that day and hour* – the day of the *Coming* (the *parousia*) of the Son of Man.

But here’s the fun part! In verse 30, when it speaks of the “Son of Man coming on the clouds” – that uses an entirely different word!

And the reason for this is because the coming of the Son of Man in verse 30 refers to a different event than the coming in verses 37 and 39.

In Greek there is no confusion!

But even in English we can see the difference by paying attention to how Jesus says that concerning *that day and hour* (the *parousia*) no one knows, whereas Jesus explains *exactly* when the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven!

So, what sort of “coming” is verse 30 speaking of?

4. The Son of Man Coming on the Clouds (v29-31)

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days (again, notice Jesus’ usage of “those days” to refer to the destruction of the temple, but “that day” in verse 36, to refer to his returning again) *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.* ³⁰ *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* ³¹ *And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

In order to understand this, we need to go back to Daniel, chapter 7.

Daniel sees a vision of the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea.

Four great beasts came up out of the sea.

And as he sees the beasts wreaking havoc on the earth,

“thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire...
[and he sees the judgment of God against the beasts]

and then,

“behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.”
[the verb “to come” is the same as in Matthew 24:30 – *not* parousia]

“And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (7:13-14)

So when we talk about the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven,
where is he “coming” to?

He is coming to the Ancient of Days.

The “coming” of Matthew 24:30 – the “sign of the Son of Man” –
is the coming of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.

The *parousia* – the coming of Jesus in verses 37 and 39 –
will be a coming *to earth*.

So now we are ready to give a very succinct answer to the disciples’ question:

The destruction of the temple *will be* the *sign* of Jesus’ *parousia*.

Of his coming again.

And it *will be* a coming – a coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven –
as the destruction of the temple signals the end of the Mosaic Age,
and the definitive beginning of the dominion of the Son of Man.

And when Jesus destroys the temple, he will “come” with the clouds of heaven
to the throne of God in glory.

Now, some people have objected that AD 70 did *not* see “the sun darkened”
and the stars did not fall from heaven –
and, for that matter, *no one* on earth (as far as we know)
saw the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven!

But the prophets often use this sort of language figuratively
to refer to catastrophic events –
particularly catastrophic events with profound spiritual significance.

And few events in human history have been more profoundly laden with spiritual significance
than the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Up until this point, the presence of God on earth was mediated through wood and stone.
Up until this point, there was *one* altar – *one* place – where earth and heaven met.
Up until this point, the age to come could only be glimpsed by *one man* (the high priest)
once per year – on the Day of Atonement.

But now, all that is changing!
Now, the *one man*, Jesus Christ, is becoming the *one place* where earth and heaven meet.
And so now, all who are united to Jesus by faith enter the age to come in him!

And that is why the Son of Man sends out his angels with a loud trumpet call
“and they will gather his elect from the four winds,
from one end of heaven to the other.” (v31)

The destruction of the temple will signal a new order –
in which the gospel of the kingdom will go forth to the ends of the earth.

5. This Generation Will Not Pass Away until All These Things Take Place (v32-35)

³² “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 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. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Verses 32-35 then conclude Jesus’ answer to the first part of their question
with an oath.

When you see all these things you know that he (the Son of Man) is near.
And he promises that *this generation* will not pass away until all these things take place.
As we saw last time, “this generation” does not have to mean “this cohort.”
But as it turns out, the temple was destroyed within forty years of when Jesus said this.

Now, you may recall that I earlier said that Matthew wrote down all these things for *us*.
And yet, everything that we have looked at today focuses on the *first century*.
What is the point for *us* who live in the *twenty-first century*?

Most of what we need to hear comes in the next section of Jesus’ discourse

(verse 35 through chapter 25).

That's when Jesus will talk about the close of the age –
things that are still future from our perspective.

But there are several things that we need to understand from *this* passage.

Let me summarize them briefly:

First, don't be surprised or alarmed by wars, famines, or natural disasters.

These things are what we should expect

in a world that does not acknowledge Jesus as King.

And Christians will be just as severely affected as non-Christians.

We talk about "common grace" –

that the sun shines on the just and the unjust.

In the same way there is "common wrath" –

that the hurricane hits the just and the unjust.

If you live in a world that is in rebellion against God,

don't be surprised when bad stuff happens!

Second, don't be surprised or alarmed when people fall away.

Sure, it *hurts* when those you love fall away from Christ.

But it happens.

Jesus said that it would.

He even said that they would *betray* you!

After all, one of the twelve betrayed *him* –

and if that was true of *Jesus*,

why should we expect anything else for ourselves?

Third, "the one who endures to the end will be saved."

As we face the "natural evils" of war, famine, and natural disaster –

and as we face the "spiritual evils" of apostasy and persecution –

we need to remember to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and *his* righteousness."

And God will take care of the rest.

Fourth, remember that Jesus *promised* that the gospel of the kingdom

would be preached throughout the whole world.

Jesus *promised* that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church.

So, even though Jesus promised us tribulation,

he also promised that his gospel *will* triumph in the end!

So do not be afraid.

After all, the *sign of his coming* has already been announced

in the destruction of the temple –

whereby Jesus has become the place where earth and heaven meet!

So really, the *point* of this passage is simply that you need to believe Jesus.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."