

May 2, 2010

**LABOR PAINS
MATTHEW 24.1-14**

This discourse of Jesus must be understood as being fulfilled, as he says, within that generation (cf. 23.36; 24.34, 35).

In answer to the disciples questions, Jesus begins to teach them what will be happening within a generation concerning the passing away of the old creation and the birth of the new creation. (I.e., the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.)

1. JUDGMENT ON THE TEMPLE (1-2)

Jesus leaves the Temple = the glory of YHWH departing from the Temple. Their house/Temple is left desolate.

Reminiscent of Ezekiel's time when Babylonians came in sieged the city, tore down the walls, and destroyed the Temple. God's glory left the Temple and went and dwelt in Babylon (i.e. with his people; cf. Ez 8–11).

Ez 11.22-23: "So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel *was* high above them. And the glory of YHWH went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which *is* on the east side of the city."

Jesus leaves the Temple and goes to the mountain east of the city, the Mt of Olives (cf. v. 3).

Disciples pointing out the glory of the Temple and its buildings. These are the old structures that are being fulfilled and left behind b/c their glory is fading and giving way to greater glory (cf. e.g. 2Cor 3).

"Seeing" important in the texts (cf. also vv. 4, 6). The disciples *see* things one way. Jesus will teach them to *see* things the way they really are.

The world is governed and defined by God's word and not the reality assigned to it by man.

So, what is his word? Not one stone left upon another. Refers back to house leprosy law in Lev 14.33ff.

- House has red or green spots in the walls, priest comes for inspection and cleansing.
- Priest returns in 7 days for second inspection. If spots haven't returned, the house is declared clean.
- If spots have returned, the house must be completely dismantled, stone by stone, and taken to an unclean place outside the city.

Ezekiel's prophecy - told to enter the wall in the Temple. He sees worship of idols going on in the walls. (Ez 8).

21.1-17 - Jesus comes, cleanses, and leaves. 21.23 - Jesus returns, declares woes b/c of the leprosy in the living stones of the Temple, and says that not one stone will be left upon another.

2. THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS (3-8)

Jesus sits down. Not just rest or position of teaching, but of judgment (i.e. enthronement).

Mt. of Olives - Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple made of olive wood. This Mt. of Olives is the new Holy of Holies where the glory of YHWH—Jesus himself—is now dwelling. It is the glory that makes the house and not the house the glory.

The disciples questions: conflated into a complex set of events which all relate to one time period.

End of the age is *not* the end of the space-time universe. Must understand place of Israel/Temple as the center of the world and world history. Ez 5.5 - Israel = the *center* of the nations.

The history of the entire universe revolves around what happens in, through, and to Israel. Jesus = the fulfillment of Israel's destiny and all of history hinges upon Jesus' life death and resurrection.

History divided into two ages: the present age and the age to come/old creation and new creation. Jesus is the dividing line for this even though it may not *appear* to us this way. We must see through God's eyes.

The Temple is still the center of the world, but it is the new Temple in Jesus—the church—not the geographical Temple of Jerusalem.

“See that no one leads you astray.” They must *see* the upcoming events for what they really are; i.e. how he defines them.

False Christs - those who come who claim to be Israel’s true king and, thus, deliverer.

Many will be led astray. “Many” used 6x in vv. 5-12. A great majority will be doing this and that which will put pressure on the disciples to comply. Easy to get caught up with the crowds.

political upheavals - creates instability and really a context for false Messiahs to arise that promise restoration and deliverance.

These are *not* the signs of the end (v. 6). They are not to be deceived into thinking that these wars meant the end was near.

geological upheaval - famines and earthquakes. Not the sign of the end. Instead, these are the beginnings of birth pains.

The way the world progresses to the end—that is, its goal—is described in terms of labor pain (cp Rom 8.19ff.). Pain will be endured in order to bring forth life. One age—the old creation—will give birth to a new age.

Do not be disturbed (v. 6) - These events should not completely disorient them. They need to see them for what they are. And they are what Jesus *says* they are: the beginning of birth pains.

3. THE END (9-14)

“Then” - “at that time”

“Tribulation” - pressure from without; people will be putting the squeeze on them; i.e. to return to the old Temple worship.

Put to death and hated by all nations, nations that they would later be commissioned to disciple (28.19-20).

Great apostasy in the church. *Many* will fall away. There will also be new Judases who betray others to death.

Hate one other - they will count those who were fellow believers as enemies.

False prophets will lead *many* astray. Cp. the time of Jeremiah, Daniel, & Ezekiel; prophets proclaiming peace when there was no peace (cf. e.g. Jer 6.14; 8.11).

Lawlessness will increase and as a result the love of many will grow cold. People will not be as excited and probably down right discouraged and despondent about the situation. They will lose heart.

“He who endures to the end will be saved.” Not a general maxim. He is talking about hanging in there through all of this stuff that is going to happen within the generation he has just described.

Does extend to the perseverance of the saints. Faith is necessary for salvation. Man is saved by faith alone. So, if a man gives up faith in the face of persecution, he can’t be saved.

The gospel of this kingdom preached to the “whole world” (*oikoumene*) - cp. Col 1.6; not the whole inhabited world but the empire structure God set up beginning with Nebuchadnezzar/Babylon and ending with Rome (cf. Dan 2, 7). Represented by a statue and four beasts. In the NT these are called “Greek” (not just “Gentiles”). Empire moves from Babylon to Medo-Persia to Greece to Rome.

This gospel of the kingdom is the good news that the whole world, all of humanity, has been re-ordered under the lordship of Jesus. This is the message: Jesus is lord. That is what Paul was accused of preaching, namely that there was another king, Jesus (Ac 17.7).

Then comes the end: the end of the labor pains and the birth of the new age.

1. *Let Jesus’ words be the lenses through which you see everything.*
2. *Don’t be discouraged, dismayed, or despondent.*
3. *Old worlds dies and are re-born in unexpected and sometimes unwelcome ways.*
4. *Mission continues even in the most adverse situations.*