

June 20, 2010

**THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN:
KNOWING WHEN HE IS NEAR
MATTHEW 24.31-35**

1. THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN (29-35)

Astronomical Signs (29): heavenly bodies = present, old creation ruling structures (i.e. Jerusalem/Temple & *oikoumene*).

The Sign of the Son of Man in heaven (30): The Son of Man ascends/comes to the Ancient of Days (Dan 7) and is given the kingdom. When this happens (i.e., he is vindicated), at the same time his enemies will be put down (i.e., Jerusalem will be destroyed).

Sign of Son of Man in heaven = all these things coming to pass culminating in destruction of Jerusalem.

Sending out messengers (31): time of salvation as well as destruction. Vindication of God's people.

"Angels" = messengers. Not necessarily spirit angels but could be human messengers (cf. e.g., Rev 2-3).

Jesus sending out his messengers refers to the missionary effort that will be taking place during these days. Jesus' people will be gathered to him in one place.

When? (1) could refer to the continual mission of Jesus' church that lasts from that time to this. We are always going out and gathering the elect from the four winds of heaven.

(2) referring to the mission of the early church whose mission was to gather up the elect who were scattered throughout the empire in the form of Gentiles and Jews and to bring them into one new body, one new house.

Note the book of Acts. Many of the converts were God-fearing Gentiles (i.e., uncircumcised worshipers of YHWH).

One of the primary missionary efforts of Paul was to bring the Jews and Gentiles together into one church. He endured all things for the sake of the elect that they might obtain salvation (2Tm 2.10).

He is a missionary to the Gentiles in order to see Jew and Gentile reconciled and made into one new man (Eph 2.11ff.). That specific mission ended in AD 70. Before then Paul and others would go to the Jew first and then to the Greek. This specific time and the strategy with it is over.

"Four winds of heaven" - Why the four winds of heaven and not the four corners of the earth? Geographical reference = all over the created order.

Also see Zech 2.6 & 6.5 - YHWH has spread his people out like the four winds of heaven. This has some reference to the nature of God's people.

"Wind" is spirit language. What Jesus said to Nicodemus about the Spirit being like wind. Also the word translated spirit can also be understood as "breath" or even "wind."

In the beginning God's wind/Spirit proceeds out of heaven to earth to form and fill the newly created world. Now, God has created a new people by his Spirit on the Day of Pentecost: the church.

God's people are a heavenly people b/c they are united to the One in heaven. They, like the Spirit who proceeds out of heaven to the earth to form and fill the creation, are spirit-people who do the same thing in this new creation.

God's people, in their very physical make-up, are spirit-beings who have heavenly origins sent throughout the world to form and fill the creation.

In Zech YHWH spread them out. Now Jesus is saying that he will gather them up. They were scattered all throughout the world as distinct groups of people, but now they will be in one body.

"Great trumpet" - not the last trumpet in 1Cor 15. This trumpet is for the ending of the old creation and the beginning of the new.

Ref to the year of Jubilee. "Jubilee" = "loud blast." Trumpet blasted to proclaim liberty.

Lev 25 - occurs after 7 weeks of years (i.e., 49 years), at the beginning of the 8th week of years (i.e., 50th year). Old creation week is complete. All that was lost in old creation (e.g., land and freedom) are now regained in this new creation.

What happens? In this year all debts are cancelled and all the land that has been lost through the years in various ways is restored to its rightful owners. There is forgiveness and the restoration of inheritance.

When this great trumpet is sounded by Jesus' angels, it will be the proclamation that forgiveness of debts has taken place *and* the land/earth has been returned to its rightful owner; namely, the Man.

2. LEARN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (32-35)

Fig trees and Israel (32): cf. Mt 21.18ff.; fig tree represented Israel.

Throughout Scripture the fig tree is used as a symbol of God's people in general and God's people in the Promised Land more specifically (cf. Num 13.23; Dt 8.8; 1Kg 4.25; Hos 9.10; Joel 1.7).

Figs and fig trees are a sign that the kingdom has arrived in peace as it did with the king whose name means peace, Solomon (1Kg 4.25).

Fig leaves - the inadequate covering of Adam and Eve in covering the *shame* of their nakedness.

Allusions: (1) the kingdom is coming. It is sprouting and the peace promised through the ages is being established.

(2) The Jews who are a part of this old creation are like the first Adam. They are seeking to be covered, but their coverings are inadequate.

Seek to use the Temple as their covering, but they will still be put to shame (cp. Jer 7.4).

The ushering in of the kingdom where Jesus the Christ rules will be the inauguration of peace for the people of God but also the exposure of the shame of those who use these inadequate coverings.

He is near (32-33): "even at the doors/gates" - some reference to the entrance of the king for enthronement. Cf. Ps 24.

This generation (34-35): "Amen" - the form of a solemn oath.

"Generation" - a time reference. Refers to the contemporaries of Jesus throughout Mt. (11.16; 12.39, 41, 42, 45; 16.4; 17.17; 23.36).

Based on the questions the disciples asked, Jesus is dealing with the events surrounding the destruction of the Temple, something that we know happened within a generation of him speaking these words.

Understanding the significance of what happened in the Person and work of Jesus as the end of the old creation and the beginning of the new creation helps us to make sense of all these things.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never, ever pass away" - Not simply adding strength to the integrity of his words by comparing them to something that seems so fixed as creation. The statement is *will* pass away not *may* pass away.

Heaven and earth are being de-created and re-created. Heaven and earth *will* indeed pass away.

Jesus' word is more fundamental than the creation itself. His is the word of the Creator.

1. *Jesus' word is more certain than anything and everything that we can see in history.*

2. *We are messengers sent out to gather the elect.*