

Jesus' Coming

Matt. 24:15-35

When Jesus answered the disciple's questions in the sermon that we call the Olivet Discourse He emphasized that the destruction of the temple, His coming, and the end would be times of judgment. Even today we may error with the disciples in rushing past the judgment to heaven and by doing so miss the sense of accountability that should direct us and also miss a passion for helping people prepare for such a judgment.

A second concern of Christ in respect to these questions was our vulnerability to deception. It is not too great a leap to go from believing that the end will come to believing that it is coming now for whatever reason. Jesus warned that the rationale for the expectation that Jesus' return would be immediate would most often (every time but one) be flawed and would represent the experience of being deceived. (Something that He does not want for us.) The perspective that will resist such deception will see human and natural disasters in the context of a fallen world, "All these are the beginning of sorrows..." Tribulation and trouble, persecution and apostasy will be accepted as characteristic of our age. Spiritual endurance will be valued and the business of the preaching of the gospel to the nations will be of primary concern.

The positive indicator that the end is near, in fact the trigger that will set the end in motion is the preaching of the gospel in all the world as a witness to all the nations. We cannot be certain as to when this standard will be met. Has it been met yet? Apparently not since we are still waiting for His coming. How far away are we from meeting this standard? Again, we cannot say except to say that God will know. Then He will act.

Now immediately after Jesus gave the positive indicator of His coming (the preaching of the gospel in all the world as a witness to the nations) He added, Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the Holy Place...then let those who are in Judea flee to the

mountains..." The prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphany desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on the altar. Jesus here speaks though of Daniel's prophecy in the future tense as something yet to happen. This is not unusual in Biblical prophecy. Prophecies will often have an immediate or near fulfillment and at the same time point to a greater or even ultimate fulfillment at a time further removed from the prophetic moment, and sometimes even beyond the consciousness of the prophet as He gives the word. Some examples of this are Isaiah's prophecy that a young woman shall conceive and bear a son (Isa. 7:14) This was fulfilled immediately as a sign that Syria's kings would be turned back from their intention to conquer Samaria. But the prophecy also looks beyond the immediate circumstance and is fulfilled ultimately in the virgin birth of Jesus. The Old Testament types often prefigure the new so that in the story of the flood you have Noah who lived through the flood, Methuselah whose name means "when He dies it shall come." and Enoch who was caught up to heaven before the flood came. This compares to the final judgment when those saved during the great tribulation will live through it, many of course will die before it comes and then there are the believers who are caught up to be with the Lord before the tribulation begins. The tribulation itself is prophesied as the experience of believers in this age and then as the great tribulation where, "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened..."

All of this to say that Jesus' view of the abomination of desolation as future is consistent with Biblical practice. It happened before and it will happen again. Was Jesus' prophecy fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD? It would seem inevitable that in the process of the destruction of the temple abominable desecration of the temple and Holy Place would have occurred. Are we then to look at Jesus' prophecy as having been completed? Possibly not, as a greater and ultimate fulfillment seems to be the point of our passage. Jesus spoke of the positive indicator of the gospel being preached throughout the world and then added therefore when you see the abomination of desolation... A natural reading or hearing of Jesus' words would expect the abomination of desolation to follow or to be at least contemporary with the meeting of the

condition for Jesus' coming that the gospel has been preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations. This then is what Jesus taught. Once the standard has been met in respect to the Gospel, then watch out for the abomination of desolation as Prophesied by Daniel. If you happen to be anywhere near Judea at that point you will want to get out fast. This would initiate the great tribulation where "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved."

This interpretation would seem to require the replacement of the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish religion has been without a temple since the Romans destroyed it in 70 AD. The present complication is that an Islamic Mosque sits on the traditional temple site and has since 691 AD. Another possibility could be that an act of blasphemy directed toward Israel's God might take place in the Dome of the Rock on the site of where the temple was. On one level it would seem that the presence of the dome on the temple mount is an abomination of desolation in itself. Whatever form it might take, the abomination of desolation will be a widely publicized current event whose purpose will be to shame and discredit the worship of the true God. It will be unusual and definitive so that those who know what to look for will be certain as to what it means. So much so that they will be able to take evasive action and escape the threat.

Associated with these times will be an increase in the appearance of false Christ's whose claims will be supported by great signs and wonders - enough to deceive the very elect. Jesus does not want His people to be deceived and so He warned us about these attempts at deception. "Therefore if they say to you, Look, He is in the desert! do not go out; or look, He is in the inner rooms! do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Jesus was present in the flesh with His disciples. This was their experience of His coming. It would be natural for them to have thought of Jesus return as a similar experience. In addition, for those who rejected Jesus when He did come and those who continue to reject that coming, the expectation where there is any would be of Christ coming as a man. Jesus here is saying that He already did that and that His future return would be as lightning that comes from the east and flashes to the west. Anyone who looks at a man and claims that he is Christ is ignorant of the fact that Jesus already did

that and there is no reason for Him to do it again. Jesus comes in the clouds with power and great glory. He comes to gather the elect. He comes in judgment.

For those in the know, the nearness of the end will be clear. It will be as clear as the coming of summer as foretold by new leaves and growth on a fig tree. When you see the new leaves then you know that summer is around the corner.

Jesus adds, "Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place..." So that the generation that sees the beginning of the end will see the end of the end.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Jesus' teaching is not all the Bible has to say about the end and about His coming but it is the foundation for all New Testament teaching on these subjects. He taught that the trigger for the end time events is the gospel preached in all the world as a witness to the nations. Maybe not a trigger, but at least a prerequisite. And He taught that Daniel's abomination of desolation clearly reconstituted at the end will initiate the great tribulation. He taught that He would not live again as a servant among men but come in the clouds with power and great glory, gathering the elect and bringing judgment upon those who are ready and those who aren't. He taught that the generation that sees the beginning of the end will also see the end of the end. He taught that no one knows when this will be, only the Father.

