

INTRODUCTION

- Final week in Jerusalem before crucifixion; some of the disciples point out beauty and arraying of temple; Jesus prophesies its destruction, and they ask question about when and signs leading up to it.
- Last week looked at section of signs leading up to it, including false teachers, wars, natural disasters, persecution, and betrayal. The disciples were called to not follow them, do not be terrified, give testimony, and persevere.
- We saw in application that these things will mark the world in which we live and we are to respond in the same way.
- Now we come particularly to Jesus' description of the destruction of Jerusalem.

EXPOSITION

I. THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM

A. THE FINAL SIGN – v.20

- He directs the disciples to the time when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies.
- The reference here is to what happened in 70 A.D. Consider situation leading up to this.
- Even at the time of Jesus, there was a group of Jewish people known as "zealots." They were opposed to the Roman rule of their people.
- The Roman yoke of bondage will become more oppressive politically and religiously (with Caesar requiring himself to be worshipped as a god).
- The resistance movement grew stronger, and eventually even those who were more moderate were persuaded to take up arms which led to the Jewish War. During this time there is great upheaval within the Roman government, bordering on chaos (4 emperors in 1 year).
- Under the rule of Vespasian, an army was sent to Jerusalem under the leadership of his son Titus. A siege began against the city of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. What this meant was a surrounding and blockading of the city to cut off all supplies. First an army would weaken this city in this way, leaving the people starving and lacking necessities, then attacking.
- This siege took place during the Passover festival, when it was filled with worshippers from all over the land. It lasted about 5 months, when the Romans would overwhelm the city.
- Jesus states that the gathering of those armies was the final sign of the city's desolation. This word means to suffer utter and complete destruction.

B. SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS – v.21-22

- v.21 - Those who are in Judea (the surrounding area), are to flee to the mountains. Those who are in the midst of the city, are to leave (and thus flee). Those who are in the country, are not to enter the city of Jerusalem.
- In other words, they were not to run there for protection (a natural response). Neither were they to stay and fight and try to protect the city. This is what the Jewish people, for the most part, did.
- v.22 - Jesus gives the specific reason why they were to flee. It is because these are the days of vengeance. A question to ask is "the vengeance of whom?" Was it merely the vengeance of the Roman empire who hated them? No, but rather the very vengeance of God Himself.
- We see this in the next part of the verse which says "that that all things which are written may be fulfilled." This is a phrase speaking about the fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy. According to the other Gospels (Mt24:15; Mk13:14) this was the "abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Dan9:27; 12:11). What was going to happen was the fulfillment of what God had told them would happen to Israel as a nation if they didn't repent.
- This vengeance included the justice required for the killing of the prophets (Lk11:50-51). And now, as Jesus is in His final days, and they will also crucify Him as the great Prophet and Messiah.

C. A PROPHETIC WOE – v.23-24a

- v.23a - Even in the fulfillment of this prophecy, notice the great compassion of the Lord Jesus. He is not an indifferent and unfeeling judge, but rather proclaims a "woe", which as always a deep and emotional lament for something terrible. This woe is directed to pregnant women and children who will suffer greatly. According to the historians, the same things happened at this destruction of Jerusalem as happened at their original fall recorded in the book of Lamentations (Lam4:10). As horrifying as it is, we are told that women who were compassionate became so desperate in starvation that they cooked their own children to try to survive.
- v.23b - This time is marked by great distress and wrath upon this people (i.e. the Jewish nation).
- v.24 - The result of this siege will be the slaughter of many by the sword of the Romans. The literal rendering is "devoured by the mouth of the sword." According to Josephus, 1,100,000 people were killed. Jesus also says that there will be many led away captive into all the nations. According to Josephus, this included 97,000 people taken as slaves and prisoners.

D. THE DURATION OF JERUSALEM'S DESOLATION – v.24b

- Finally, Jesus gives indication as to how long this desolation will be in effect. The imagery He uses is of the city of Jerusalem being "trampled" by the Gentiles. This means being put under foot, being under their rule and control. He says the duration is "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."
- This is a particular passage of controversy within the Christian church. There are two major interpretations:
 - 1.) That Jerusalem will overcome until the end of a Gentile age of the church, where the Kingdom of God will primarily be for them. Then, at a later time, Jerusalem will be restored and the Jews will reenter. Then Jesus will return, take the throne as king, and then rule there for 1,000 years. – This is known as pre-millennialism.
 - 2.) That Jerusalem will be overcome by the Gentiles, not only Rome, but also other non-Jewish nations. This will be true all the way up to the end of the present age, then Jesus will return and establish the New Jerusalem, together with a new Heavens and earth. - This is known as a-millennialism.
- Regardless of which is closer to the truth, it is clear that Jesus is emphasizing a long time, indicated by times (or seasons – plural) of the Gentiles.
- What happens in this event is a complete dismantling of the Old Covenant sacrificial system. There will be, for a very long time, the inability to engage in the sacrificial system as established through Moses that had been done in the temple.

II. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

- At this point, we run again into a difficult interpretive decision. Does this section run chronologically, so that what is now said follows the events just spoken of, or is it an overlapping description? Because of the magnitude of the things here described, together with how those things will end, I understand them to be chronological (thus the heading).
- For this view, we have to adopt an understanding of "prophetic compression." What I mean is that Jesus, in foreseeing future events, compresses things, which includes not mentioning everything in between. One example of this is seen in the book of Isaiah, when the description of Jesus as suffering servant and victorious king are constantly intermingled.
- If this is the case, then Jesus describes the destruction of Jerusalem, then the "times of the Gentiles" (a very long period), then what follows.

A. COSMIC SIGNS – v.25-26

- There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. There will be cosmic upheaval of things "above." It says in v.26 that the powers of heaven will be shaken.

B. EARTHLY SIGNS

- This will also bring about a tumult in the sea, causing roaring waves, what we may call Tsunamis.

C. HUMANITY'S RESPONSE

- This will then bring great distress on the earth, not just for the nation of Israel, but of all the nations. This distress will bring about a perplexity, meaning utter despair. The people of the earth will be so distressed that there will be despair, not knowing what to do.
- He says that men's hearts will fail them from fear and the expectation of those things that are coming on the earth. It will be evident that God is shaking the earth itself in judgement ([Heb12:26-27](#)).

D. THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN – V.27

- It is in conjunction with these events we are told that they people on the earth, the very ones who are terrified at what is happening, will see the Son of Man coming. Jesus has taught throughout His ministry that the time would come when He would return to judge the world in righteousness. And now, in these verses, we have that description.
- He says He will come on a cloud, indicative of the divine presence. It will be a coming of his power and great glory. Though He is about to die in apparent weakness and defeat, the time will come when His claims will be vindicated. They will see His power, His authority, His rule as the Son of God. He will come with great glory, the very glory He shared with the Father before the foundation of the earth. A select few will see that after His resurrection, but the time will come when all will see Him in this way.

III. A FINAL EXHORTATION – v.28

- In light of these things that Jesus has told His disciples, He want them to act and respond differently than others. Where others respond in despair, He wants them to look up in hope for the coming of the redeemer and their full redemption.
- It is clear that first and foremost, this exhortation is to those original disciples. They were going to be very aware of the realities Jesus has prophesied to them. Rather than being perplexed, they are to trust. Rather than falling apart at the great upheaval of everything they have known, they are to look with great anticipation to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

APPLICATION

- This is the historical reality of God's judgement. It was a judgement on all kinds of people, including men, women, and children, land, animals. God had given promises and gracious warnings.
- This passage is a warning to us of unrepentance. It is a warning again assuming on grace, and depending on the past. God is serious in regards to sin. While there is great grace, it does not negate the possibility of great judgement. At these times we are more aware of the consequences of sin.
- This would all take place after the presence, death, and resurrection of Christ. What Jesus accomplished did not change the character of God. God is not a cosmic "softie" who just ignores human sin. The New Testament still describes Him as a consuming fire ([Heb12:29](#)).
- The great hope in the midst of our greatest stress is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory.