

Review

We are beginning the two chapters of the gospel of Matthew which are described as, "The Olivet Discourse." On the Mount of Olives, Jesus is going to give a massive overview of the end times to some of His disciples. In it, we will learn about the Rapture of the Church, the Tribulation Period, the Judgment of the Nations, and the Millennial Reign of Christ on earth. But today, we will be looking at Jesus' statement which prompts the question that prompts the Olivet Discourse...

24:1-2 Zerubbabel's Temple

When the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and carried the Jews off to captivity, Solomon's temple was destroyed.

After the Babylonian Empire was replaced by the Medo-Persian empire, the Jews' seventy-year captivity in Babylon ended. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity and rebuilt the temple, under the direction of Zerubbabel.

This new temple wasn't altogether impressive when compared with the one Solomon had constructed. At the dedication ceremony, when many of the people were shouting with joy, Ezra tells us,

Ezra 3:12-13 Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

At that point, God told Haggai the prophet to go tell Zerubbabel,
Hag. 2:3 Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

God told him to take courage, that He was with them, His Spirit was in their midst.

And so Zerubbabel's temple, which was so humble compared to

Solomon's temple, was the place where God's people met with Him.

Herod's Temple

Five hundred years later the world stage had changed again. The Medo-Persian Empire had been replaced by the Greek Empire, and then the Greeks had been conquered by the Roman Empire. In 63BC, the Romans took over the land of Israel. In 37BC, Herod the Great was made king over the Jewish lands by the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar.

Herod had a passion for buildings. He had many fortresses, temples, and towers built, as well as his own palace in Jerusalem. And more than a decade before a little baby named Jesus was born in Herod's jurisdiction, Herod decided to undertake a massive building project on temple mount. He would completely refurbish and rebuild Zerubbabel's temple into a world-class monument.

The temple mount was extended by filling in the deep valley to the north, making the foundation now about 35 acres. More than 10,000 workmen would be kept busy for over 80 years before the temple would be finished.

You may recall that early in His ministry, Jesus entered the temple and drove out the moneychangers. The Jews asked Him,

John 2:18-21 ...“What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

They misunderstood Jesus' answer, but they did give us the accurate information that Herod's temple had already been under construction for 46 years.

One of the things that took so long for the building project to be finished was that the temple had to remain "open for business" during the entire renovation. Another hindrance was that to avoid noise in the holy place, the stones to build the temple were shaped several hundred feet away from the temple mount. These stones were massive - conservative

estimates place them at 16 feet long, others say that they were 20 feet by 40 feet! Each one would have to weigh well over a hundred tons each! Each would need to be cut, transported, and put into place. We can begin to understand why the building of Herod's temple took so long!

The Warning

This newer, bigger, more grandiose temple of Herod's impressed the Jews greatly. It was awe-inspiring, and made even Jesus' disciples marvel. They pointed out the temple buildings to Him.

Mark 13:1 ...one of His disciples *said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”

But Jesus wasn't impressed with the works of mans' hands. He'd created the entire world by the power of His will. The universe sprang into being with a simple statement (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). Not only that, but because He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), He knew that in the not-too-distant future, this place wouldn't look so impressive.

Jesus told the disciples clearly,

Luke 21:6 “As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down.”

Imagine what insanity that must have sounded like! This temple was so massive, so well-constructed, it would last as long as the earth! Could it be that He was once again talking about the temple of His body? No, He'd said "these things which you are looking at," and mentioned the stones specifically.

The Destruction Of The Temple

It had been prophesied by Jesus about 32AD. 31 years later, in 63AD, the temple was completed. But those years had been difficult between the Jews and the Romans. Numerous rebellions, insurrections, and seditions had taken place.

There were men who claimed to hear from God, who would get large followings, leading them out into the wilderness as Moses did, to sup-

posedly see signs from God (Josephus, Wars, 2:13:4). One of the men who was the most successful was an Egyptian Jew who claimed to be a prophet. He got a following of 30,000 people. From the wilderness, he led them to the Mount of Olives, and was going to attack the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. But Governor Felix's troops defeated them and the Egyptian ran away (Josephus, Wars, 2:13:5).

You may remember that when the Apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, the commander of the Roman guard asked him,

Acts 21:38 “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

Four thousand of this guy's following were men called Assassins, or literally "Sicarri." They had been bringing lawlessness to the nation by broad daylight murders. Hiding their daggers (sikarim) under their garments, they would assassinate prominent people in crowds, and then immediately join the crowd in showing shock at what had just happened. So they could never be caught (Josephus, Wars, 2:13:3).

Each situation like this would start right after another calmed down. Josephus writes, "And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war." (Josephus, Wars, 2:13:6). War between the Romans and the Jews became inevitable. When they attacked Herod's royal citadel on Masada the war began (Josephus, Wars, 2:17:2).

Caesar Nero sent Vespasian to command the Roman army against the Jews, but when Nero died, Vespasian was made emperor, and so he sent his son Titus to finish the job. He put the city of Jerusalem to siege.

Titus gave orders for battering rams to bring down the western wall of the inner temple, since there were Jews holed up there protecting the house of the Lord. The Romans hit that wall for six days without making a even a dent. Then the Romans got the great idea of climbing over it with ladders. The Jews were waiting for them at the top to kill the Romans as they climbed over. Some of the ladders were even pushed backwards while they were full of soldiers! When Titus saw how many of his men were dying, he gave orders to set the temple gates on fire - this

would provide them a safer entry to the temple. Once this was accomplished, Titus ordered the fire to be put out. But one of the soldiers set fire to a window (Josephus, Wars, 6:4:5), and the entire temple burned (Josephus, Wars, 6:4:7).

After the rest of the Jews were killed, Titus gave orders that the temple and the entire city should be demolished (Josephus, Wars, 6:9:1). The act was done, and looking up at the temple mount, one could see that just as Jesus had said, not one stone was left upon another.

The Real Cause

Why did all of this have to happen? On Palm Sunday,

Luke 19:41-44 ...He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.

Jesus Christ had come, but they refused to believe in Him. Their ultimate destination then, was destruction. The same is true for each of us today. Jesus Christ has come, offering forgiveness of sins, and eternity in heaven. But if we reject Him and refuse to believe in Him, we can only expect destruction. Jesus said,

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Have you recognized the day of your visitation?