

15. Unveiling the future

4/23/2006

Too often in life we play around with sin. Even though we know the difference between right and wrong, we often choose what is wrong. We know what the Bible says, but somehow we think that we are above what God's Word says.

Many people today know the truths of Bible prophecy. They know God has foretold many of the events happening around us right now and in the future. But they continue to live as they please, just as if nothing the Bible predicts is true. Despite what they believe, the Lord's coming draws closer every day.

Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

In other words, it is time for us to wake up and live for Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to see Jesus unveiling prophecies of the future of the nation of Israel during the time of the Great Tribulation.

A. JESUS' PREDICTION OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Mark 13:1-4 Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" 2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." 3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 4 "Tell us, (1) when will these things be? And (2) what will be the sign (3) when all these things will be fulfilled?"

The disciples had good reason to be amazed, because the temple compound, as remodeled by Herod the Great, was one of the magnificent structures of the ancient world.

The historians say that the temple was huge – nearly 500 yards long and 400 yards wide. Herod's rebuilding started in 19 B.C., and was not completed until 63 A.D., taking more than eighty years. The magnificent temple compound was finished only seven years before it was destroyed by the Roman army.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus says that the temple was covered on the outside with gold plates that were so brilliant that when the sun shone on them it blinded any observer. Where there wasn't gold, there were blocks of marble of such a pure white that strangers, from a distance, thought there was snow on the temple.

Today, tourists can see some of these massive stones, at least the ones used to build merely the retaining wall for the temple compound. These cut, quarried blocks of limestone are so big – some are 50 feet wide, 25 feet high, and 15 feet deep – that modern construction cranes could not lift them. Archaeologists are still not completely certain how these stones were cut, transported, and placed with such precision that they don't even need mortar.

In 70 A.D., there was a widespread Jewish revolution against the Romans in Palestine, and the rebels enjoyed many early successes. But ultimately, Rome crushed the Jews. Jerusalem was leveled, including the temple – just as Jesus said.

It is said that at the fall of Jerusalem, the last surviving Jews of the city fled to the temple, because it was the strongest, most secure building in the city. Roman soldiers surrounded it, and one drunken soldier started a fire that soon engulfed the whole building. Ornate gold detail work in the roof melted down in the cracks between the stone walls of the temple, and to retrieve the gold, the Roman commander ordered that the temple be dismantled stone by stone.

At the first chance they got the disciples wanted to know about the signs Jesus mentioned to others.

- 1) When will these things be?
- 2) What will be the sign?
- 3) When all these things will be fulfilled?

Jesus will answer each one throughout this chapter.

B. FALSE MESSIAHS & PERSECUTIONS AGAINST THE JEWS

Mark 13:5-13 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. 7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows. 9 But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false messiahs, false prophets and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples. How easy it is for spiritually blind people to follow popular leaders and gullibly accept their faulty solutions for the problems of life! Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by these imposters, and that warning holds good today.

In troubled times, many people assume that the end of the age is near but Jesus said that wars and rumors of wars are not signs of the end. Jesus was telling them and us that these calamities were not specific signs of the end, but that they were the beginning of sorrows, which is literally the beginning of labor pains.

Because of v10, some people misinterpret that all nations have to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we must spread His Word fast; otherwise, the rapture cannot happen. As I said, it is a misinterpretation. Jesus is not talking about the things going to happen before the rapture, but the Great Tribulation. As I have said before, there is not one prophecy that needs to be fulfilled before the rapture of the Church.

In v11, Jesus tells His followers to not worry about what to say when they are "put on the spot" for being a follower of Jesus. At that moment, the Holy Spirit will give them words to say.

A powerful example of this principle is found in Acts 4:1-22, where Peter and the other disciples make a dramatic proclamation of Jesus before the hostile Sanhedrin.

This verse cannot be the base for the lazy preacher who fails to prepare his sermon and try to wing it and claim that he is relying on the Holy Spirit. I totally rely on the Spirit of God while I teach, but I study and prepare each teaching for 10 to 16 hours.

In China, people would be allowed to practice Christianity only in the state-sponsored church, or be persecuted. 1,500 churches were destroyed or shut down since November of 2000. Researchers estimate that since the Day of Pentecost in the first century, more than 43 million Christians have been killed for their faith.

Knowing how Christians have stood for Jesus during the centuries, and how our brothers and sisters are being persecuted all over the world, what kind of a stand to we make for Jesus? Do we advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ with our "leftovers"? I hope not and we should not.

C. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION AND THE SECOND HALF OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Mark 13:14-27 "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. 16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter. 19 For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. 20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. 21 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

The phrase "abomination of desolation" comes from the Book of Daniel and refers to the idolatrous pollution of the Jewish temple by the Gentiles. To the Jews, all idolatry is an abomination. The Jewish temple was defiled in 167 B.C. by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes when he poured the blood of pig on the altar. This event was predicted in Daniel 11:31.

Daniel 11:31 And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.

The temple was also defiled by the Romans in A.D.70 when they captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. However, these events were but previews of the final "abomination of desolation" prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11.

Daniel 9:27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.

Daniel 12:11 And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

If you divide 1290 days with 365 years, it becomes three and a half years. But what signals the beginning of this awful seven-year period? The signing of a covenant between the nation of Israel and "the prince that shall come". This "prince" is the coming world dictator that we usually call "the Antichrist." In the Book of Revelation, he is called "the Beast". He will agree to protect Israel from her many enemies for seven years, and will even allow the Jews to rebuild their temple and restore their ancient liturgy and sacrifices. The Jews rejected their true Messiah but will accept a false messiah. However, after three and a half years, Antichrist will break this covenant, invade the temple, set up his own image, and force the world to worship satan. That is the abomination of desolation.

For centuries, there was only a small Jewish presence in Judea and Jerusalem. Their presence in the region was definite and continuous. But it is unthinkable that this weak Jewish presence could rebuild a temple. Therefore the fulfillment of this prophecy was highly unlikely until Israel was gathered as a nation again in 1948.

There is a small but dedicated group of Jews who are passionately committed to rebuilding the temple. Today you can visit the Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter of the old city in Jerusalem. You can find their web site at www.templeinstitute.org. There, a group of Jews absolutely dedicated to rebuilding the temple attempt to educate the public and raise awareness for a new temple. They are trying to replicate everything they can for a new temple, down to the specific pots and pans used for sacrifice. They have students who are being trained for the priesthood, learning how to conduct animal sacrifices in the rebuilt temple.

According to our Israel friend Lt. Col. Ronny Simon of Israel Defense Force Reserve, they already have all the prefabricated materials to rebuild the temple as soon as they have a chance.

Rightly, Christians get excited when they see efforts to rebuild the temple. However, we should understand that the basic impulse behind rebuilding the temple is not of God at all – the desire to have a place to sacrifice for sin. Christians believe that all sacrifice for sin was finished at the cross, and any further sacrifice for sin is an offense to God, because it denies the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Because of this portion of Scripture, there are a group of people who believe that born-again Christians, the Body of Jesus Christ, will go through the Great Tribulation. But it is nothing more than a misinterpretation of their part. If they read a little further down, they are going to realize that Jesus was talking about this with the Jewish people in mind, not the church.

D. THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE

Mark 13:28-30 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 29

So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near--at the doors! 30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

In the Bible, the fig tree represents the nation of Israel. He is still talking about the Jewish people during the time of the Great Tribulation.

What generation does Jesus refer to? It cannot be the generation of the disciples, because they did not see the triumphant second coming of Jesus. It is undoubtedly the generation that sees these signs - especially the abomination of desolation.

E. NO ONE KNOWS THE DATE

Mark 13:31-37 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. 32 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning-- 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

Now Jesus is switching His gear to the rapture of the church. He wants us to be alert and watchful. He doesn't want us to be faithful in our task and diligent, not to speculate or debate about the hidden details of prophecy.

2 Peter 1:20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation

I have no idea why some of Christians come up with these stupid idea of setting date of the rapture. The worse part is that some other people actually believe their stupidities. When Jesus said that no one knows, that means NO ONE KNOWS.

F. CHALLENGE

Knowing how Christians have stood for Jesus during the centuries, and how our brothers and sisters are being persecuted all over the world, what kind of a stand to we make for Jesus? Do we advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ with our "leftovers effort and time and money"? I hope not and we should not.