

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class

“What Will the End of the World Be Like?”

II. New Testament Passages

A. Matthew 24 and 25

The setting of this passage is what we call Holy Week, the days between Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and His crucifixion on Good Friday. Jesus likely spoke these words to His disciples on Tuesday evening of that week. This is called His “Olivet Discourse.” It is the fifth and last of Jesus' great speeches in Matthew's gospel (which corresponds to the five books of Moses in the Old Testament). “By the process of prophetic foreshortening...two momentous events are here intertwined, namely, a. the judgment upon Jerusalem, and b. the final judgment at the close of the world's history...in describing the brief period of great tribulation at the close of history, ending with the final judgment, Jesus is painting in colors borrowed from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans” (William Hendricksen, Matthew, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1973, pages 846-847).

Verses 1-3: On leaving the temple area the disciples note the impressiveness of the temple buildings. While small by our standards, Jerusalem's temple after the renovations done by King Herod the Great, made it one of the most impressive man-made structures of the ancient world. Even the Jewish rabbis, who did not care for Herod at all, had to admit that a person had not truly lived without having seen the temple building because of its grandeur. Some of its stone blocks measured 37 feet long, 18 feet wide and 12 feet high and were decorated with gold. This structure was built when horsepower really meant horses doing the work!

Jesus' words about the temple's destruction were fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem to end the Jewish revolt that had started four years earlier. As part of that destruction, the stones of the temple were even pried apart in order to collect the gold leaf that melted from the roof when the temple was set on fire. Excavations in 1968 uncovered large numbers of these stones, toppled from the walls by the invaders.

“In response to His disciples admiring comments about the temple, Jesus predicts its destruction. The things of this world do not endure. All earthly splendor will be forgotten on the Last Day. Understanding the provisional nature of material things leads us to place our highest hopes in the Lord and what He has in store for us in the new heavens and the new earth” (Lutheran Study Bible, page 1635)

Jesus' words about the destruction of the temple caused His disciples to think of the Last Day and the return of the Son of Man in judgment. They think that the end of the temple also must mean the end of the world. Mark tells us that it was Peter, James, John and Andrew who asked the question of verse three. With this question the disciples must realize that Jesus' first coming would have to be crowned by a second coming in glory. The Mount of Olives is east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley. From here Jesus and the disciples had an excellent view of the temple mount. The setting sun may have been shining off of the gold and marble buildings.

Verses 4-8: **Have people predicted the end of the world?** _____ **Were they right or wrong?**
Have some even claimed to be the Messiah? _____ **Example?** _____
Do we regularly hear of wars and rumors of wars? _____ **Earthquakes & famines?** _____
What is all of this to remind us of? _____
What do the “beginning of birth pains” tell us? _____
Do those birth pains tell us the minute, hour or even day of the delivery? _____

Birth pains do get more intense as the birth of the baby approaches. So it will be in the end times. The severity and frequency of catastrophic events in this world will increase. During this time followers of Jesus must not lose their watchfulness and strength.

Verses 9-14: **What three things does Jesus say will happen to “you”?**

Why does He say that these things will happen? _____

What does Jesus say will happen “at that time”?

(verse 10) _____

(verse 11) _____

(verse 12) _____

Would you describe this list as being law or gospel? _____

(verse 13) “he who _____ firm to the _____ will be _____”

What is “the end”? _____ (individual) and _____ (world)

“The words ‘will be saved’ refer to the salvation that Christ will grant to all His loyal followers when He returns: eternal, complete salvation and escape from eternal ruin” (H.N. Ridderbos, Matthew, Zondervan, 1987, page 440).

Verse 14: What must happen before the end comes? _____

Does this give us some time indication of when the end will come? _____

Consider William Hendricksen’s description of mission work: “A brief survey of the progress of missions from the earliest period until the present day will convince anyone that the days in which we are now living are significant indeed! By and large the gospel has been spreading ‘from the rising of the sun to its setting.’” (He then recounts the history of Christian mission work from the days of the apostles to the 20th century, all in a westward direction.) “The work has not been completed...But it cannot be denied that the prophecy of our Lord is approaching fulfillment. Consider this important fact: seventy years ago the Bible (as a whole or in part) had been translated into only 300 languages; today into about 1400 languages and dialects. And the work is still continuing; in fact, more vigorously than ever, many forces combining to bring it about.” (Hendricksen, op. cit., pages 855-856)

Mission ministry and Bible translation are ongoing works supported by our prayers, presence and presents. In the forty years since Hendricksen’s commentary, there are now over 2250 languages that have at least one book of the Bible in their own writing (out of about 6000 known languages).