

The revolution ousts the old order—Matthew 24:15-35

Theme: The destruction of the Jerusalem temple is the historical sign that Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth

Continuing to answer the disciples' question about the destruction of the temple and the end of the age, Jesus urges them to observe carefully what is going on and to see it as the fulfilment of prophecies in Daniel 7 and 9. The signs on earth will be clear enough but if we are going to read them correctly, we need to know what will be happening simultaneously in heaven. This is what Jesus tells us here.

Questions:

1. What do we think this section of Matthew teaches us about how to read the Bible?
2. In what way do we think Jesus was a prophet?
3. What are the clues that the language of this section is derived from Old testament prophecy?
4. Why do you think Matthew included this teaching section in his manual on discipleship? What do we learn from it that helps us to live in our day and age?
5. In what ways was the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple like the end of the world? Can you think of a recent contemporary event that might be described in the same way?
6. Jesus says that the overthrow of the temple will be proof that he is the person Daniel saw in his vision in 7:13-14. Why? And what does this mean for us?
7. In what way does this section help us to trust Jesus? How does it help us to trust the Bible?
8. Do we think prayer really makes a difference to the way big world events unfold? How can we encourage one another to pray for difficult things happening in our world today?
9. In Daniel's vision once the Son of Man was given all authority (7:14), he shared it with his people (7:26-27): what does this mean for the way we live and work in the world?
10. How can we help others to see the truth of what Jesus says about our world and who he is?

Your stories:

Potted summary

Jesus spells out in some detail the events that will lead up to the destruction of the temple. And he tells the disciples what these events say about him and the fulfilment of prophecy.

The fall of Jerusalem does indeed mark the end of the age, but not the end of the world. The disciples are called to live through these times with prayer and bold testimony to Jesus as the Lord of history, the one enthroned in glory next to God—as Daniel saw.

More over the page....

What the passage is about....

Jesus is continuing to answer the disciples' question (3). They assume that the destruction of the temple, the end of the age and the coming of Jesus will all happen together. Jesus agrees with them but his answer shows that these things do not happen in the way the disciples expect, though they will happen in fulfilment of prophecy.

V15 begins with the word 'so' linking what Jesus says in this section with 'the end' (referred to in v14). It's important to realize that the end of the age is not the same as the end of the world as will become clear as we work through the passage.

1) eyes to see: (15-25)

The disciples have asked about the destruction of the temple because of what Jesus said in v2. He says that the overthrow of the temple will be the sign that he has been speaking the truth (v25). You'll see it, he says; it'll happen just like I've said it will. This is why he gives so much detail. Contemporary accounts of what actually happened in the run up to the Jewish revolt and the Roman response—such as the works of Josephus—show that what he says here is pretty much what happened.

The 'abomination' (15) was the arrival of the Roman standard in the temple precinct, something that almost happened in 40AD when Caligula ordered it just before he was assassinated, but eventually happened as the legions swept through the city burning and destroying it in 70.

What happened fulfils previous prophecy; Jesus—the last and greatest of the prophets—agrees with those who came before him. Behind this whole section Daniel's prophecy looms large (especially 8:13, 7:13, 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11). Jesus shows his followers that what he is saying and what they experience, happens in fulfilment of scripture.

In this way he is teaching us how to read the Bible. So is Matthew—this is why he adds the aside at the end of v15 (Jesus has hearers; only Matthew has readers!) It's crucial that we read the Bible correctly; in particular, that we see which events in

history are being talked about in prophecies. Otherwise, all kinds of dangerous nonsense gets spoken by people seeing prophecy fulfilled where it isn't. So, Jesus shows us that Daniel's visions all led up to this catastrophic event that was to happen in the lifetime of his audience (v34).

And Jesus is saying that when you see the temple fall, you'll know two other things for sure—the answer to the second part of the disciples' question.

2) end of the age (29)

'Immediately' indicates that what Jesus now describes happens as the action of v15-25 unfolds. The only way to describe it is to quote scripture—in this case Isaiah 13:10, 34:4 (though great swathes of prophetic material are in view here, such as Micah 7:2-10; Isaiah 14:4, 12-15; Ezekiel 32:5-8; Joel 2:10-11, 30-32; 3:14-15, Jeremiah 50-51—all of which speak of God judging nations in history, in terms that sound like the end of the world).

The destruction of the temple *will be* the end of the world as the disciples and Jewish nation knew it. God is moving in judgment, the temple is now and forever irrelevant, replaced by Jesus as he has shown (21:12-22) and said (23:33-39).

In Jesus God's people is redefined. It no longer draws its identity from the temple and Jerusalem; now it its identity comes from following Jesus. This is why messengers (better translation than 'angels') are gathering the elect from the four corners of the earth (31)—no longer the people of Israel being brought home from exile, but people of every nation now being called to follow God's messiah.

3) enthronement (30)

Even more out-of-this-world, the fall of the temple is the sign that something incredible has happened in heaven: Jesus has been enthroned.

Again, the Old Testament background to this is Daniel—this time chapter 7 (especially v13). This story is told from the perspective of heaven not of earth. So the Son of Man, seen coming, is not moving from heaven to earth but in the opposite direction,

from earth to heaven. This is not the second coming of Jesus! And once in heaven he receives all authority from the ancient of days (7:14).

This is precisely what Jesus says to the priests at his first trial in 26:64. And it's why he here quotes Zechariah 12:10-14. This will be a time of mourning for those wedded to the temple, for their world is crashing around their ears. But worse than that, the very one they rejected, pierced, is seated next to God. He has all authority (28:18) while they have been stripped of theirs in the overthrow of the temple.

4) enduring through the end (26-28, 32-35)

What has this got to do with Matthew's readers and us? Simply this. Jesus describes a world-shattering cataclysm, but life goes on through it and beyond it. These events will demonstrate once and for all that all the old securities that the disciples hung on to have been swept away under the hand of God's judgment. They now live in the new age of the Messiah, Jesus.

i) return (26-28): a danger the disciples now face is that people will come claiming to be Jesus or to be from him, who will lead them astray. He says that his return will be obvious—as obvious as lightening lighting up the sky or vultures circling a carcass. So don't be deceived. More than that: **i) rely on me (35):** Jesus is calling his disciples to trust him with their lives (v16). He's told them what will happen, so they'll be ready for it and plan to survive it. He tells them to face these times with prayer because it will make a difference (20).

But fundamentally, as they see his words coming true, they'll know for sure that every word he says can be relied on. In an all-too uncertain and rapidly-changing world, where all kinds of people claim to know the way to go, Jesus calls his disciples to follow him—through the darkest of days as well as the brightest of times.

As we read these words in a troubled world, they call us to trust Jesus: will we?