

Sunday, November 14, 2021 pm

Premillennialism 6 – The Great Tribulation (2)

We are in the midst of studying various elements associated with the theory of premillennialism. Having discussed what premillennialism is how much of God's prophetic fulfillment was related to a spiritual kingdom, we have begun dissecting the various elements of this theory to show it is false. We have discussed the rapture and in our last lesson we began discussing the great tribulation.

For most, period of tribulation occurs after the rapture so the world is filled with more ungodliness as the righteous are now gone. It is an event that is supposed to last for 7 years based upon the 70 weeks vision in Daniel 9 which we examined in our last lesson on this system of belief. With disasters of all sorts seeking to drive men to repentance, most will not, but some will turn to God including many Jews. Halfway through the tribulation, the antichrist will arise and a "great tribulation" of persecutions will begin for a period of 3½ years. After this the Lord will return.

The case for the great tribulation is based upon 1) Daniel 9 which is where the concept of 7 years is developed based on its 70 week prophecy; 2) Matthew 24:21 which speaks of great tribulation; 3) Revelation 6-18, esp. 7:14 – the case being made that since the church is not mentioned in these chapters that it has already been "raptured".

In our last lesson, we examined Daniel 9. In summary, that prophecy looked to its completion (the 70th week) in the time of Jesus and addressed Jerusalem's rejection of God (Vs. 23 noting a time for them to "finish the transgression" which could be reference to Israel finishing their rejection of God by rejecting Jesus) and thus His rejection of the physical city. We showed how the entire "70th week" occurred during the time of Christ coming. We noted that numbers in apocalyptic literature are best taken as figurative (not necessarily literal numbers but representative of complete periods of time). We concluded by noting that in Daniel 7 you do NOT find: 1) A gap or parenthesis which premillennialism describes as the "church age", 2) a timeline dealing with the end of the world (it deals with Jerusalem) – these are the two elements of the "great tribulation" that premillennialists use this text for.

In this lesson we will continue to address the great tribulation by examine: 1) Matthew 24, and 2) some observations about Revelation. In our next lesson we are going to discuss events associated with that timeframe – the antichrist, Armageddon, etc.

- I. Concerning Matthew 24:21 and text – the text is relatively clear about the event it involves
 - i. The context of Matthew 24
 1. In our studies on the teachings of Jesus we have recently addressed Matthew 23 as the final public teaching of Jesus as recorded by Matthew. After Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem, Matthew records a series of teachings indicting the nation of Israel and its corrupt leaders. Matthew 23 was likely "the straw that broke the camel's back" leading to His crucifixion that week.
 2. At the end of that scathing lesson we find Jesus grieving over Jerusalem because He knows its fate (Matthew 23:37-39). He declares, "Your house is left to you desolate" – their end was coming.
 3. Matthew 24:1-2 – Jesus then went to the temple and was walking with His disciples who showed Him the buildings of the temple. Jesus notes, "Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Jesus prophesied the utter destruction of the temple (and Jerusalem).
 4. 24:3, His disciples come to Him to inquire, "When will these things be?" They actually ask 2 or 3 questions – When will THESE things happen? 2) What will be the sign of the coming of

Jesus: 3) What will be the sign of the end of the age.

ONE source noted that likely they were thinking these were all combined. Jesus could have made a distinction between the destruction of the temple and His final return (which I where I lean). That leaves to “the Olivet discourse” as it is described.

ii. Note first of all Matthew 24:34 –

1. Jesus noted, *Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*
2. NOTICE that Jesus declared that the events of Matthew 24 would occur within the lifetime of some of the disciples He was speaking to. We MUST keep in mind thus that this text is dealing with an event during the first century – namely, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
3. Premillennialists say “generation” is a future generation or a reference to the Jewish people (IOW, as long as Jews were around that the prophecy was yet to be fulfilled. Thus, they tie it to their premillennial theory.
 - a. This does NOT fit the definition of “this generation” – a generation is a multitude of men living at the same time (Vine’s then includes this verse in its definition).
 - b. Thayer also gives a similar definition.
4. Consider Mark 8:12, “Why does this generation seek a sign?”, Luke 11:50-51 – the blood of all the prophets required on *THIS generation*, Luke 17:25 – rejected by this generation!
5. Note again Matthew 24:33-34, Mark 13:29-30, Luke 21:31-32 – “this generation...” Note also “When YOU see these things” – speaking to the apostles and those living at that time!
6. “You” – 2, 4, 9, 15, 20, 23, 25, 26, 33 – throughout our text, the word is used as we shall see. Jesus was speaking to THEM – Who had approached Him? His disciples asking Jesus, “when will these things be? Note the questions!

iii. The text of Matthew 24¹ –

1. **Vs. 4** – “Take heed that no one deceive YOU” – Jesus begins with a warning to His disciples. He is going to proceed to describe another things that they will see.
2. **Vs. 5** - “False Christs” (5) – The New Testament gives us examples of this.
 - a. Acts 5:36 – Theudas, Acts 8:9 – Simon the sorcerer, etc.
 - b. Josephus also referenced more than one – An Egyptian false prophet (War of the Jews) and Theudas – Antiquities of the Jews
3. **Vs. 6-7** – wars and rumors of wars – nation against nation. When Christ was upon the earth, there was relative peace in the Roman empire. That did not last. Historians of that time recorded numerous wars among peoples during that time.
According to Barnes’ Notes on this text – 4 emperors died violent deaths within an 18 month period prior to Jerusalem’s destruction. This led to great upheaval.
4. **Vs. 6**, “*but the end is not yet*” – Jesus is simply saying these happened BEFORE the destruction of Jerusalem.
5. **Vs. 7** – *famines and pestilence* – Acts 11:27-28 records a famine; again other histories record various famines throughout the empire.
6. **Vs. 7** – *earthquakes* – again history records a number of earthquakes during the first century, including in Asia minor destroying many cities and even in Judea as well as other places.
7. **Vs. 8** – *all these are the beginning of sorrows*. Jesus is indicating that worse things were coming. Bear in mind that these are general descriptions throughout the empire and most if

¹ NOTE: Many of the details beginning with verse 5 are taken from David Padfield’s “Days of Vengeance” available for download at: <https://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/days-of-vengeance.pdf>

not all were experienced locally at some point. ALSO, Jesus transitions to some things the disciples would experience for their faith following this.

8. **Vs. 9-10** – persecutions of various sorts – as you read through Acts and other places you find some of these listed. They would be hated by all nations – again a journey through Acts shows this taking place. We have addressed Matthew 10 where Jesus sent out the 12. He gave various similar descriptions there as well.
9. **Vs. 11 - False prophets will rise up** – again scripture identifies some. And numerous passages warn of such which indicates their presence – 2 Peter 2:1-3 a warning; 1 John 4:1, Jude, 2 Thessalonians 2, etc.
10. **Vs. 12** – *because of lawlessness the love of many will grow cold* – we know the peril of lukewarmness and numerous other warnings against drifting, etc.
11. **Vs. 13** – *but he who endures to the end will be saved* – this is a standard warning to remain faithful unto salvation.
12. **Vs. 14** – the gospel will be preached in all the world – Colossians 1:23.
13. **Vs. 14** – *then the end will come*. Some might use this phrase to say this is about the end of the world. But as we have already noted, it was about THAT generation! And WE ARE STILL HERE! That fact also defeats the AD 70 doctrine (realized eschatology) using this text.
14. **Vs. 15** – *Therefore when you see the "Abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel* –
 - a. In our last lesson on Daniel 9:27 we noted a mention of wings of abomination that make desolate. That could have been reference to Rome as they would be the instrument God used to destroy Jerusalem and the temple.
 - b. However the actual phrase found in our text is found in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11 – both of these texts are likely referring to an event during the period of silence when the wicked general Antiochus violated the temple by sacrificing to idols therein. The fulfillment of this is recorded in the apocryphal book of 2nd Maccabees (1:54-56). He violated the temple and outlawed the Jewish faith threatening to execute any family that circumcised their sons, etc. His desecration lasted about 3 ½ to 4 years.
 - c. Matthew quoting Jesus is using this historical event as example of what is going to happen to Jerusalem. Likely the reference here is to Rome surrounding Jerusalem in siege. Consider Luke's account – Luke 21:20 says, *"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that desolation is near."*
 - d. However it could have reference to some events leading up to Jerusalem's destruction. Consider the verses that follow which indicate, **WHEN you see this get out of the city**, thus the warning was before Jerusalem was destroyed. When Rome surrounded Jerusalem under Titus in AD 70, there was no leaving. HOWEVER, history records that the zealots had been active for a few years prior which caused Rome to have to respond to them. Roman history records 3 generals surrounding Jerusalem – Cestius Gallus in AD 66, Vespasian in AD 68 and Titus in AD 70. According to Josephus, Vespasian was preparing to surround Jerusalem, but upon hearing of the death of Nero he put off his expedition and returned to Rome to determine what to do. Titus would return and ultimately finish the destruction of the city.
 - e. Josephus also records an occasion when Zealots stormed the temple and defiled it around AD 67-68. Josephus believed this was the fulfillment of Daniel (Jewish Wars 4:150-157)
- iv. **Vs. 15-20** – When YOU see the abomination... the let those in Judea flee...
 - a. Several events are mentioned in these verses when they saw these signs – they were told to:
 - i. "Let those in Judea" – again, this was local!

- ii. Flee to the mountains – GET OUT of the city. Leave everything.
- iii. If in the field, don't go back to get your clothes
- iv. Woe to those who are pregnant or nursing babies.
- v. Pray that it not happen on the Sabbath or in the winter – on the Sabbath the gates would have been closed. In winter, survival would have been much more difficult.
- b. Consider these descriptions show this is not about the Lord returning. Consider, if this is the Lord coming why flee from the city, pray it not be in winter or on the Sabbath or a woman is pregnant? Those things WILL NOT matter when the Lord returns (even in the premillennial theory they are unimportant).
- c. It has been said that when Jerusalem was destroyed NO Christians were in the city.
- v. **Vs. 21** – “for there will be great tribulation” such as has not been seen before or would come afterward. Some thoughts on this:
 1. Luke 21:22 described this as “these are the days of vengeance” – this indicates it is a punishment. God pouring out His vengeance.
 2. Again, history records what it was like in Jerusalem when Titus besieged the city in the spring of 70 AD. There was famine and great bloodshed. It is estimated that more than a million Jews were killed, and nearly 100000 more taken as slaves.
 3. Josephus records that when the soldiers breached the city, they went down streets mercilessly killing everyone. As they entered houses, in some they found corpses that had died from the famine. Blood flowed so abundantly through streets so that in some cases it extinguished fires that had been set by the Romans to burn out those who fled for refuge. (Wars, 6.8.5)
- vi. **Vs. 22** mentions *the shortening of days* and notes that it *was for the sake of the elect*. The destruction of Jerusalem was swift. It did not last forever and wipe out every Jew in the empire, but only addressed Jerusalem.
- vii. **Vs. 23-26** – some would see this as the end of the world (NOTE: This is an argument of the 70 AD doctrine) and say that Christ was returning then. Jesus is clear – “**Do not believe it!**” He told them this “**beforehand**”. This is NOT the 2nd coming of Christ. Even the premise of false christs would arise – the Bible warns against such. 2 Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of the coming of the lawless one coming with power, signs and lying wonders. We will address this more when we talk about the antichrist.
- viii. **Vs. 27- 28** – as lightning comes – a declaration that this destruction will be swift and powerful. It is also described as a “coming of the Son of Man.” Contextually this has to be reference to Jesus coming in judgment on Jerusalem because of context. In previous lessons we have noted that there have been many “days of the Lord” or days of judgment. Some applied to the punishment of Israel and Judah and others. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was clearly a day of the Lord, so in that sense the Son of Man came in judgment.
- ix. **Vs. 29-30** – *speaks of signs in heaven*. To understand this, realize that in the Old Testament (apocalyptic literature) stars and the heavens falling were usually a reference to rulers of varying nations facing God’s wrath and falling. (Cf. Isaiah 13:10-13 – of Babylon; Isaiah 51:5-6 – of various peoples. Amos 8:1-9ff – of Israel being Judged, etc.). In our text Jesus is declaring the fall of the corrupt Jewish rulers.
- x. **Vs. 31** – they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds (judgment from God), nations will mourn, and His elect will be gathered together from the 4 corners. In all this language we find the events will be so great, the hand of God is clearly evident in it (especially since it was prophesied).
- xi. **AND the “elect” God’s saved will be gathered** – they will be delivered as a result of this judgment. The destruction of Jerusalem was a victory for Christians. AND, it is said that No Christians were killed in the destruction of Jerusalem – they got out!

- xii. Vs. 32-34 – the parable of the fig tree – Jesus TO HIS DISCIPLES, gives a parable about knowing the time of harvest. Jesus is saying concerning the judgment of Matthew 24 (up to this point) would be manifest by various KNOWN signs. Christians, if they paid attention (and they did) would be able to SEE this judgment taking place. NOTE again vs. 34 – *“this generation will by no means pass away...”*
- xiii. **Returning to 24:2** – one final observation. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Titus gave orders to demolish the city and temple. Every stone was taken down and whatever gold was inlaid was scraped or melted. The ground was plowed like a field and the city became a heap of ruins.

We have seen in this lesson that Matthew 24 is clearly about the destruction of Jerusalem (at least through vs. 35. The rest of the chapter (24:36-44) is believed by some to still refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, but others (this is my leaning) believe that Jesus transitions to His second coming. The main reason, Jesus notes that that coming will be unknown, and life would be proceeding as normal (no signs). Therefore, we are commanded to watch and be ready

Regardless, the text we have examined today, CLEARLY is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. To plug it into a future earthly physical return of Jesus requires a twisting of the text and great imagination. And that is what you get from the doctrine of premillennialism. Do not be fooled by this false theory. Instead, prepare for the Lord to return! When He does, you will stand in judgment (Matthew 25). Are you ready for that day? Think about it!

