

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series - Matthew (Lesson SB_MT24A)

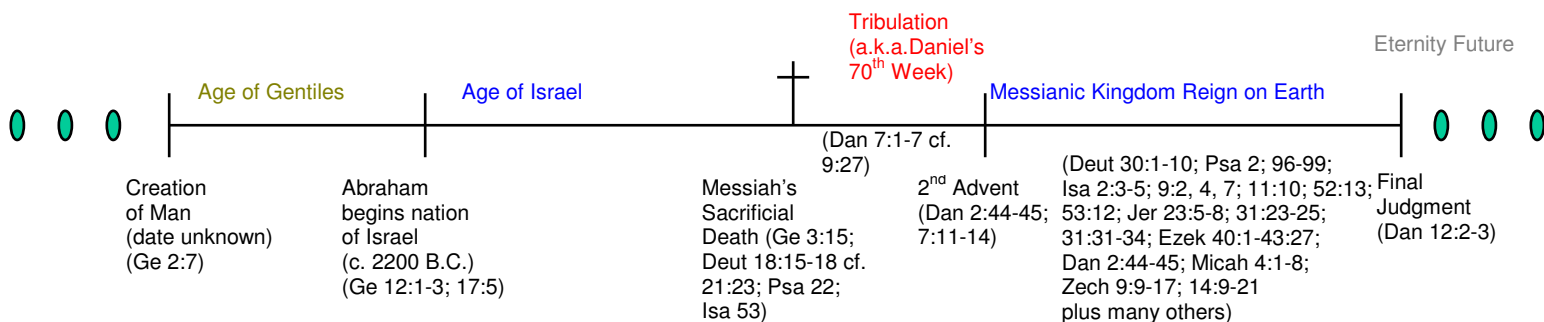
Introduction

Evidently, the discourse of Jesus to the multitudes in chapter 23 occurred within or about the temple area. The first temple of Israel was built by Solomon and was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians and that year marks the beginning of the 70 years of Babylonian rule over Israel and the 5th cycle of discipline per Leviticus 26 that ended in 516 B.C. The second temple was built under the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah and the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (Hag 1:1) and was completed in 516 B.C. The third temple was a renovation of the second temple by Herod which began circa 20 B.C.; however, the renovations were not completed until A.D. 64. Therefore, Herod's temple stood for only six years before it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The destruction of Herod's temple was so devastating that the precise location of the sanctuary is still unknown today. In 23:37-39, Jesus acknowledges Israel's rejection of Him as the Messiah. Jesus knew that there was little possibility that Israel would ever respond to the offer of the kingdom through Him as the Messiah.

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age (24:3-14)

The disciples were evidently puzzled by Jesus' statements that He made in 24:2. They must have pondered what Jesus said while on their short journey through the Kidron Valley between the Temple and the Mount of Olives. Their question in verse 3 reflects their confusion over what Jesus had taught regarding the establishment of the kingdom. Remember that the gospel that they had been commissioned to preach was the "gospel of the kingdom" as apostles to Israel (Matt 10). The "gospel of the kingdom" was still the gospel with which Jesus was concerned (24:14). So Jesus is still teaching principles regarding the Age of Israel with no teaching relating to the Church having yet occurred. The timeline that would have most accurately reflected His teaching and which would have been consistent with the understanding of the Hebrew prophets as well as what should have been understood by His disciples would have looked something like the following:

The Prophetic Timeline from the Viewpoint of A Believer During Jesus' Public Ministry



Jesus has previously taught the disciples about the kingdom as recorded by Matthew in such passages as chapters 5-7 and 13 and others. No doubt, He had also taught them additional information regarding the kingdom which is not recorded in Scripture. Their questions in verse 3 reflects their confusion over the subject for they are trying to reconcile His prophecy regarding the destruction of the Temple with the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. Obviously, the timeline above and the Scriptures to support it were not entirely clear in their minds. So, Jesus tries to clear the picture up for them. It is VERY important to realize that Jesus' perspective reflected in this passage is one that only recognizes the Age of Israel and IMPLICITLY ASSUMES the acceptance of the Messiah by Israel at some point in the near future without the intervening Church Age. At this point, I believe that even Jesus in His humanity did not know about the establishment of the Church which was to be an intercalation into human history. This belief is based upon my understanding of the following:

- The nature of the hypostatic union of the deity and humanity of our Lord during His incarnation;
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in His life;
- The nature of His spiritual life that serves as our prototype;
- The fact that it was the Father's plan that Jesus was executing (see Acts 1:6-8); and
- The offer of the Kingdom to Israel through Peter after our Lord's resurrection which offer in effect constituted a second chance for Israel to accept the Messiah (see Acts 3:19).

In His humanity, Jesus knew exactly how many years Israel had left for her dispensation to run its course. The Holy Spirit taught His human spirit using such passages as Daniel 9:24-27. On the basis of that passage in particular, Jesus knew that He fulfilled the portion regarding "Messiah the Prince" (v. 25) and the sixty-nine weeks (483 years) that extended from "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince" (v. 25). He also knew that after His death, there would be one additional "week" of years (seven years) of the Age of Israel also known as the Tribulation since the total number of years predicted by Daniel for the Age of Israel was 490 years (v. 24 cf. vv. 25-27). [Note: one week equals seven years].

No doubt, the disciples equated Jesus' prediction in Matthew 24:2 regarding the Temple to Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:26 that the "city and the sanctuary" would be destroyed by the "prince who is to come". However, we need to look at this passage in Daniel in order to have the proper frame of reference for Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24.

Daniel 9:24-27 Explained

- The Hebrew word for "week" is *shabua* and literally means "a seven".
- Therefore, the meaning of "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9:24 is seventy times seven, i.e. 490.
- We can support the interpretation of the 490 as a reference to 490 years based upon the following:
 - Leviticus 25:8 equates "seven Sabbaths of years" with "seven times seven years" or "forty-nine" years. Seven (every seventh year was a Sabbatical year) times seven Sabbaths equals 49 years (every 49th year was a special Sabbatical year of Jubilee). The idea is that a Sabbath day occurs once a week and God also established a Sabbatical year every seventh year. Therefore, there was a precedent in the Mosaic Law prior to Daniel for equating a week with seven years.
 - Daniel had been thinking in terms of years and multiples of years earlier in the chapter (Dan 9:1 cf. 9:2). Daniel had been reflecting upon Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the duration of the Babylonian captivity of which Daniel was a part in Jeremiah 25:11, 12 and 29:10-14.
 - Daniel knew that the Babylonian captivity was based upon a violation of the Sabbatical year as indicated by Leviticus 26:32-35. When combined with Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of captivity, Daniel knew that the period of captivity in Babylon was related to Israel's failure to observe the Sabbatical year over a 490 year period prior to the Babylonian captivity.

- Therefore, the revelation to Daniel through the angel Gabriel of “seventy weeks” constituted a second chance of sorts for Israel.
- The seventy years of Daniel 9:24 began with the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. and ended with the rebuilding of the Temple in 516 B.C. The Jews began going into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C. and began returning to the land in 538 B.C. after Cyrus’ decree. However, the Temple represented the spiritual life of Israel, so the seventy year period of captivity is viewed by most conservative scholars to be the years 586 to 516 B.C.
- The “command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” in verse 25 is best understood to refer to the decree of Artaxerxes in circa 444 B.C. in which he authorized Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:2).
- The end of the 69 week period (“seven weeks and sixty-two weeks”) of verse 25 is A.D. 33 or the year of Christ’s death based upon the Jewish lunar calendar of 360 days. The actual terminal event would have therefore occurred in April of A.D. 32 or 33 depending upon whether one accepts the date of Artaxerxes decree as 444 or 445 B.C.
- In verse 25, the separation of the 69 weeks into a period of 7 weeks (49 years) plus 62 weeks (434 years) is best explained as follows:
 - It took a period of years to rebuild the city and walls after Artaxerxes decree and verse 25 might suggest 49 years.
 - The last book in the OT (i.e. Malachi) is often dated in close proximity to a period 49 years after 444-445 B.C., i.e. circa 400 B.C.
- The end of the 69 week (483 years) period is prophesied in verse 26 and is associated with the “cut off” of the Messiah. This is best understood to be a prophecy of the Messiah’s death on the Cross.
- In verse 26, the “people of the prince who is to come” has been a difficult phrase to interpret as well as the last half of verse 26. The best explanation that I have at this point is that it is a reference to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem during the last half of the Tribulation by the forces of the Antichrist. This seems to be supported by Revelation 11:2 and Zechariah 14:1-3 which prophesy at least a partial destruction of Jerusalem during the Tribulation. Zechariah 14:1-3 indicates that the city is in existence although it is overtaken by war at the very moment that Christ comes back at His Second Advent. This would explain the phrase in verse 26 that “till the end of the war desolations are determined.”
- The “he” of verse 27 is the Antichrist and refers to its antecedent in verse 26, i.e. “the prince who is to come.” He is the future enemy of God’s own identified by Jesus in Matthew 24:15-26.
- The Antichrist makes a covenant with “the many” who are unbelieving Jews who enter into alliance with the Antichrist.
- The covenant is for a period of one week or seven years.
- Verse 27 indicates that the Antichrist will put an end to sacrifices and offerings. This is the “abomination of desolation” that Jesus referred to in Matthew 24:15 after which would occur the “great tribulation” per Matthew 24:21. The same division of the seven year Tribulation into two halves to include the worship of the beast is found in Revelation 7:14; 12:14; 13:1-18; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20 and 20:4.

Back to Matthew 24:3-14

Verse 6 of Matthew 24 is further evidence of the fact that even the humanity of Christ was not anticipating the Church. Jesus speaks to His disciples as if they will personally experience these things. If Jesus in fact knew of the Church Age at this point in His ministry, it seems rather strange that He would be teaching His disciples as if they would personally experience something that we know to have been at least 2000 plus years in the future. Obviously, Jesus taught from a paradigm shaped by the revelation given to OT prophets and illumined by the Holy Spirit which assumed an acceptance by Israel of her Messiah and which is reflected in the timeline above. Jesus was also given additional revelation through the Holy Spirit (e.g. Matthew 24); however, I

believe that there is no indication in the book of Matthew to date that Jesus' teaching reflects an awareness of the Church Age.

The famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are more fully described in Revelation (e.g. Re 6:1-8; 8:5-13; 9:13-21; 16:2-21). The word "sorrows" in verse 8 literally means birth pangs and refers to the period of intensified travail that the earth will go through just prior to the dawn of the Messianic restoration of the earth at Jesus' Second Advent. The earth is experiencing birth pangs today (Ro 8:22); however, they will be intensified just prior to delivery of the restored earth of the Millennium.

The "love of many will grow cold" (v. 12) refers to the cowardly acts of believers to preserve themselves during the pressures of the Tribulation. Many will accept the mark of the beast and even turn against other believers. On the other hand, it is very likely that some who have accepted the mark of the beast as unbelievers and who later become believers will use their mark to obtain food, clothing, etc. and thereby provide assistance to believers who have not accepted the mark of the beast.

The one who "endures to the end" (v. 13) is a reference to the believer who makes it to the end of the Tribulation without being killed. It has no reference to the Church Age believer and to interpret it in that manner is to violate all consideration of context.

Notice in verse 14 that the Gospel that will be preached is the "gospel of the kingdom". During the Tribulation, people will be evangelized looking forward to the Second Coming of the Messiah Who died on the Cross.