

Study of the New Testament

Lesson 5: The Gospel according to Matthew

Literary Structure:

Outline based on Missionary Journey and Geography:

The Early Life of Jesus: *Matt. 1:1-4:11*

The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee: *Matt. 4:12-18:35*.

The Ministry of Jesus in Judea: *Matt. 19:1-28:20*.

Literary Outline:

Epilogue: The Passion and Resurrection of the Messiah (26-28)

- A. Introduction: The Messianic King (1:1 – 2:23)
 - 1. Genealogy (1:1-17)
 - 2. Infancy Narrative (1:18 – 2:23)
- B. The Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 3:1 – 7:29)
 - 1. The Messiah had Come (3:1 – 4:25)
 - 2. Discipleship Sermon: The Call to the Kingdom – Sermon on the Mount: (5:1 – 7:29)
- C. The Spread of the Kingdom (8:1 – 10:42)
 - 1. Jesus' Miracles and Reactions (8:1 – 9:38)
 - 2. Missionary Sermon: The Apostolic Call to be Emissaries of the King (10:1-42)
- D. Signs and Parables (11:1 – 13:53)
 - 1. Signs and Reactions (11:1 – 12:50)
 - 2. Kingdom Sermon: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-53)
- E. Faltering Faith and True Greatness (13:54 – 18:35)
 - 1. Resisting Faith in Jesus (13:54 – 17:27)
 - 2. Ecclesial Sermon: True Greatness within Kingdom Family Life (18:1-35)
- F. Present Opposition and Future Victory (19:1 – 25:46)
 - 1. Intensifying Opposition (19:1 – 23:39)
 - 2. Eschatological Sermon: Future Victory (24:1 – 25:46)
- G. Culmination of Jesus' Ministry (26:1 – 28:20)
 - 1. Conflict, Discipleship and the Cross (26:1 – 27:66)
 - 2. Resurrection Victory and the Great Commission (28:1-20)

Present Opposition and Future Victory (19:1 – 25:46)

Last week we looked at: Intensifying Opposition (19:1 – 23:39)

Eschatological Sermon: Future Victory (24:1 – 25:46)

Discourse: Matthew 23:1-25:46 Future Victory

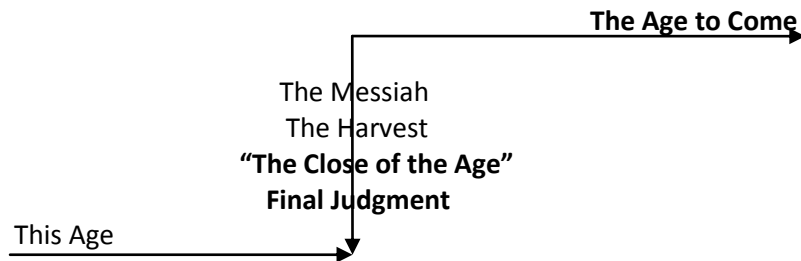
- The Seven Woes to the Pharisees and Scribes (23:1-36)
- Lament over Jerusalem and Prophecy of its Destruction (23:37-24:2)
- Signs of End of the Age (24:3-31)
 - The Abomination of Desolation
 - The Coming of the Son of Man
- The Timing of Final Judgment (24:32-30)
 - The Lesson of the Fig Tree
 - Parables of the Wise and Foolish Virgins
 - Parable of the Faithful and the Wicked Servants
- Final Judgment The Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)

Definitions:

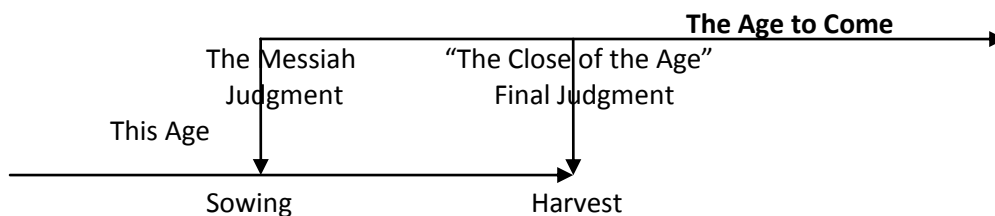
Eschatology—the study of the “End Times.”

Apocalyptic—having to do with a “disclosure” or “revelation” of the End often using the form of revelatory visions or dramatic cataclysmic language.

As we said before in Lesson 3, the fundamental problem of the prevailing Jewish expectation was a desire to see the Kingdom of Heaven immediately consummated with the coming of the Messiah.



However, Jesus taught through his Parables of the Kingdom that their expectations were mistaken. While the coming of the Messiah did bring forth the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom would take time to develop and mature before the final consummation: a consummation which would include final restoration and final judgment.



First, the Son of Man would come to plant the seeds of his Kingdom. Later, he would return later for a great harvest. Not only would there be a phased approach with the coming of the Final Restoration, the same would be true for Final Judgment. Jesus taught that the judgment of God would begin with an initial judgment on the corrupt Jewish leaders and institutions such as the Jewish Temple. But, he also prophesied that there would be a Final Judgment of all the people in the world which would come at an unknown hour later in redemptive-history. This final judgment would seemingly take a long time, but nevertheless the righteous of the Kingdom of Heaven would be ready.

The entire discourse falls in the category of prophetic speech. Prophecy in the Bible is used to communicate the present application of the promises of God to his people, both the promises to bless for covenant faithfulness and the promises to judge for unfaithfulness. One way to look at prophets is as God's prosecuting attorneys who bring lawsuits against the people for violation of God's covenant and hold out hope of restoration for repentance. Theologians speak of the time in which we now live as the "now" but "not yet". We "now" realize some blessings and judgments of the end in light of the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, but the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth is "not yet" here in its fullness.

The Seven Woes: 23:1-38

This discourse focuses on the Pharisees. It takes the form of a prophetic lawsuit or "rib" against the Pharisees and Scribal leaders. He begins with a general indictment on them for their pursuit of self glorification at the expense of others. First, put heavy burdens on others which they themselves were not willing to bear. Jesus taught exactly the opposite about himself. "Come unto me you who are weary

and heavy laden and I will refresh you, for my burden is easy and my yoke is light.” (11:28-30) Second, they loved to do things in order to receive praise from men. Jesus taught that we should only practice our religion for the Father who sees in secret. (6:1-18) He then moves to a sevenfold “woe” oracle for the following hypocrisies:

1. For making salvation hard for other people (v. 13).
2. For corrupting converts (v. 15).
3. For trivializing religion (vv. 16-22).
4. For neglecting what is actually important (vv. 23-24).
5. For self-indulgence (vv. 25-26).
6. For wickedness within (vv. 27-28).
7. For the murder of God's prophets (vv. 29-36).

This final woe related to the blood guilt of the current Jewish leadership for its rejection of God’s prophets is particularly prescient. Just as Jesus predicted in his parable of the Vineyard, the Jewish stewards of the vineyard would kill the Son (ben) of the vineyard owner resulting in their deserved judgment as the “Stone” (eben) crushes them.

As in a court case, witnesses are called:

“Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers....on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.” (23:31-35)

And...judgment is pronounced:

“Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (23:36)

Lament over Jerusalem and the Prophecy of its Destruction (23:37-24:2)

As with all pronunciations of judgment in the Scriptures, it is not the desired outcome for YHWH. Jesus laments what must come upon the city as a consequence of their unfaithfulness on the day of his/YHWH’s visitation.. Jesus summed up his feelings about Jerusalem in this way in Matthew 23:37-38:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look your house is left to you desolate (23:37-38).

While Jesus disciples are impressed by the temple complex, Jesus is not impressed.

“But he answered them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.’” (24:2)

Signs of the “now” End of the Age (24:3-31)

The disciples questioned Jesus as to the timing of these prophecies of judgment and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He answers that they will know the signs of the judgment of Jerusalem. It would happen within “this generation” (23:36; 24:34), but that they would not be able to time “that day” when the “heavens and earth will pass away.”(24:35-36)

The Abomination of Desolation

The main sign that the time of Judgment was upon them was the “Abomination of Desolation”. The reference is from Daniel chapter 9 and refers to some type of pagan symbol or idolatry set up within the Jewish temple:

²⁴ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Matthew hints to his readers with the parenthetical comment, “let the reader understand” that these things were happening in their day. Indeed, in 70 AD the Romans would sack Jerusalem and destroy the Jewish temple.

The Coming of the Son of Man

In the Old Testament, YHWH uses foreign powers, natural disasters, economic collapse, etc. to execute his judgments. These things are acting as his agents. Nevertheless, he is sovereign over these “powers” and they are doing his will and bidding on the “Day of Judgment”. The same is true for the judgment of Jerusalem, the Romans are the earthly instruments of judgment for the “Son of Man”. Nevertheless, it is he who comes on the “Day of Judgment”. The judgment of YHWH always comes with not only earthly disasters and agency, there are the accompanying apocalyptic signs and portents in the heavens.

"Besides these [signs], a few days after that feast, on the one- and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running

about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence"

"A supernatural apparition was seen, too amazing to be believed. What I am now to relate would, I imagine, be dismissed as imaginary, had this not been vouched for by eyewitnesses, then followed by subsequent disasters that deserved to be thus signalized. For *before sunset chariots were seen in the air over the whole country, and armed battalions speeding through the clouds and encircling the cities.*" (Josephus (A.D. 75) - Jewish Historian, *Jewish Wars*, VI-V-3).

"13. Prodigies had occurred, but their expiation by the offering of victims or solemn vows is held to be unlawful by a nation which is the slave of superstition and the enemy of true beliefs. In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure. Few people placed a sinister interpretation upon this. The majority were convinced that the ancient scriptures of their priests alluded to the present as the very time when the Orient would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world." (Tacitus (A.D. 115) - Roman historian, *Histories*, Book 5, v. 13).

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Like a fig tree's early shoots are a sign of summer. So too, the signs of the judgment on this generation will be fairly predictable. Let the reader understand! If you are smart you will flee far away from Jerusalem. (24:16) The judgment will be severe. Jesus reminds them that "this generation will not pass away until all of these things take place." Jesus words are sure: they will not pass away either! The only thing that will pass away is the Heavens and the Earth. But Jesus holds "that day and hour" out as an unknown mystery held in the secret councils of God the Father. (24:36) He now turns to a reflection on the Final Judgment that remains a "not yet" but is most certainly promised. In the interim time, there will be much tribulation. (24:9)

The Timing of the “not yet” Final Judgment (24:32-30)

While the judgment on Israel, Jerusalem and the temple would be accompanied by signs in order that it could be easily discerned and predicted by the faithful and righteous who were “understood” the signs, the Final Judgment cannot be expected or anticipated. It will just show up one day, like the flood in Noah’s day or a thief who arrives unannounced in the middle of the night.

Therefore the righteous followers of the Kingdom of Heaven need to be alert and always prepared for the final judgment. The parables of the ten virgins and the talents serve as a warning to procrastination when it comes to repentance. The delay of the final judgment provides precious time to “get ready” and be faithful stewards of the time and resources given. But, one does not want to be caught by that day unprepared or unfaithful to God’s call on our lives.

Final Judgment the Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)

At the final judgment, Jesus is the final judge. He is also the criteria upon which everyone on the planet will be judged. There may be some surprises on that day on the part of both the “blessed” and the “cursed”. Lip service is not enough, stewardship of the kingdom is related to how well we minister to the “least of these my brothers.” Who are the humble siblings of the King? The poor? The larger context of the Gospel would seem to warrant considering these “least of these my brothers” as the gospel messengers of Jesus. (cf. “my brothers” 12:50; 28:10 cf. “the least” 5:19, 11:11, 18:3-6). As Jesus said to the twelve when he sent them out in Matthew 10:32-33:

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Next week: The Culmination of Jesus’ Ministry (26:1 – 28:20)