

Not One Stone upon Another
Matthew 24:1—2

Jesus left the religious leaders in the temple telling them that they would not see Him until they say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” This is a direct reference to the Second Coming when He comes back to rule from the temple in Jerusalem. With that He leaves the temple. It is no longer the Father’s temple (John 2:16) nor Christ’s temple (Matthew 21:13) but the leader’s temple (Matthew 23:38). There was no room for God in their temple. They were using it for their own purpose and power and they didn’t want anything or anyone to upset their authority.

Matthew 24 introduction

As Jesus leaves the temple His Disciples come to Him and point out the temple buildings to Him. Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the building of this temple after the 70-year Babylonian Captivity around 520 B.C. Zerubbabel was instrumental in pulling the people together to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:2). It would be logical to call the second temple Zerubbabel’s temple but is usually called Herod’s Temple because Herod the Great worked to remodel the temple beginning around 20 B.C. This remodeling was still going on as Jesus and His Disciples were overlooking the temple and continued to 63 A.D.

The information in this chapter goes along with Daniel and Revelation. Daniel 9 specifically details Israel’s history in a 490-year timeline beginning with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the end of the Tribulation. This chapter in Matthew is an answer Jesus gives to His Disciples concerning the end of the age.

Three temples

The first temple was built by Solomon and was a glorious temple. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. 70 years later the second temple was completed but was much inferior to Solomon’s temple. It was actually disappointing to those who were building it according to Haggai 2:3. The second temple was built in 515 B.C. and destroyed in 70 A.D. The third temple that will be the one built sometime early in the Tribulation and will allow Israel to finally, once again, reinstate the sacrificial system as outlined in the Mosaic Law. It will be from this temple that the abomination of desolation takes place when the antichrist sits in the temple as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Most people will accept him as the Messiah, but the believing remnant will not be deceived and upon seeing this will flee Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15).

The final temple (fourth temple) will be the Millennial Temple and is described in Ezekiel 40—48. I believe this temple will be a heavenly temple that will be brought to earth for Christ and the Disciples to rule from. It is called “My Father’s house” in John 14:1—2 and fulfills a promise given to the Disciple concerning their leadership position in the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 19:28). It has nothing at all to do with believers in this Church age.

The fourth temple is often called the third temple because the Tribulational temple is not counted. Temples one, two and four are all built at God’s direction whereas the Tribulational temple is built at the hand of the antichrist. He is imitating Christ even to the point of supplying a temple to Israel with the semblance of peace. It is understandable how those without the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the Tribulation will accept the anti-messiah as their Messiah.

Destruction of the Temple (verses 1—2; Mark 13:1—2; Luke 21:5—6)

It is the second Temple that the Disciples turned to look at, probably as they are ascending the Mount of Olives, and commented about the beauty of the temple. Notice they don’t say temple but use the phrase temple building (or temple structures—structures pertaining to the temple). The temple area was much more than just the temple for it encompassed a whole campus of buildings surrounding the temple. The comment about the temple prompted Jesus to reveal that there will come a day when not one stone will be left upon another that will not be torn down. There will be a complete destruction of the temple mount. This comment

prompted Peter, James, John and Andrew to ask when these things will happen and what will be the sign they are to watch for before their fulfillment.

The normal explanation for the fulfillment of this prophecy is the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70 A.D. and is accepted as the only possibility by a vast majority of theologians. I too have accepted this explanation for many years in spite of having a niggling remnant of doubt in the back of my head. It turns out that the destruction by Titus does not stand up to close scrutiny on two counts, contextually and prophetically.

Contextually, Matthew 24 centers on events leading up to the end of the age including events before the Tribulation (verses 4—8), in the Tribulation (verses 9—28) and after the Tribulation (verses 29—31). The events of 70 A.D. do not fit within the scope of these events (although there are Preterests who see this destruction by Titus as fulfillment of the Tribulation. This is not possible since it does not fit with the description of the Tribulation as being more intense than at any other time in human history—Matthew 24:21—22). Jesus' answer was specifically about the end of the age, which did not happen in 70 A.D.

Prophetically, there is no room for the destruction by Titus to fit into the events prescribed to Israel in Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks of years or 490 years. All of Israel's future was laid out systematically with Daniel giving us the overall picture of Israel's future. Matthew 24—25, Luke 21 and Revelation all fill in details to Daniel's timeline. Daniel defines the number of years Israel has to the end of the age.

The Babylonians took Daniel captive when he was a young man, perhaps less than 20 years old. As an old man toward the end of the Babylonian captivity he was reading Jeremiah the prophet and discovered that this 70-year captivity was coming to an end (Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 29:10). With this discovery, Daniel sought the Lord through prayer, supplications, fasting, sackcloth and ashes confessing his sins and the sin of his people Israel. He desired to know what God was going to do next when the captivity comes to an end. God answered him by giving a general outline of what Israel will go through and how many years they must wait before the end of the age. Using Daniel 9:24—27 it's possible to see when major events will happen to Israel. For instance it gives the time of Christ's death and the time of the Tribulation. Although we don't have precise enough historical information to pinpoint exactly when the Tribulation would begin we know from Daniel's prophecy that it would begin within a couple of years after Christ's death, burial and resurrection. If that's the case, the destruction of the temple by Titus could not be part of Daniel's prophecy and would fall either after the Kingdom is set up or during this Age of Grace. Neither seems to be a possibility.

Right division yields an answer

Right division, separating God's plan for Israel from God's plan for the Church, the Body of Christ will lead to an understanding of Matthew 24:2. Since Israel's future is defined by prophecy and her future is laid out for 490 years ending with the coming Millennial Kingdom it is easy to see that events happening in 70 A.D. could not be in view when Jesus told the Disciples that there will be no stones left standing upon another. This event is yet future and will happen around the events of the Second Coming.

The prophecy states that there will be no stone left upon another in the whole temple compound yet the western wall (wailing wall) was part of Herod's temple and still stands. Daniel, however, plainly states that the temple will be destroyed within the 490-year prophetic period (Daniel 9:26). There are a number of Scriptural references that show a great shaking happening toward the end of the Tribulation and when Christ comes to take the throne (Ezekiel 38:18—23; Haggai 2:5—9, 21—22; Micah 1:3—4; Nahum 1:5—6; Revelation 6:16; Zechariah 14:4). I believe it is these quakes that will lead to the final total destruction of the one temple built by the hand of Satan. The three other temples were all God-directed.

The final call to Israel came from the Holy Spirit speaking through Stephen. With Israel rejecting the offer of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ was standing, ready to bring the wrath of the Tribulation upon the earth. Instead, God stopped the prophetic clock and put Israel temporarily aside and then began to deal with man individually through the Mystery program as revealed through the Apostle Paul. Once this dispensation has ended, God will once again pick up with Israel where He left off and finish the events of prophecy.

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