

Tribulation for Jerusalem before the End

Matthew 24:15-35

Halifax: 10 December 2006

Introduction

Today we continue our study of Matthew 24.

- Last time we looked at the first 14 verses of this chapter...
 - We saw how Jesus' had stirred up His disciples by declaring to them that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another that would not be cast down!
 - From childhood, they were under the impression (along with most of the Jews) that this magnificent temple would stand until the very end of the world.
 - That made them suppose that the glory kingdom they wanted Messiah to bring (with themselves seated on their twelve thrones receiving honour and wealth) would appear very soon...
 - And so they ask Jesus in verse 3:
 - Matthew 23:3: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"
- The first thing that comes out of Jesus' mouth in response to this is a warning!
 - He says,
 - Matthew 23:4: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."
 - Jesus then proceeds to explain to them that the glory days they are seeking will not come for a very long time.
 - They will be subjected not only to the common troubles of this life (wars, rumours of wars, famines, and earthquakes)
 - but also to persecution that is targeted specifically at them because they are His followers.
 - Why does Jesus feel compelled to warn them like this?
 - He warns them because He knows that those who are constantly expecting all their troubles in this world to end will easily fall prey to false prophets and false Christs...
 - Their false expectations will cause them to look for Him before the time.
 - When someone comes along with promises, they will be easily deceived.
 - He informs them that the end will not come until the gospel has been preached in all the world.

- And He explains that they will be hated not only by the Jews, but by all nations.
- They are to prepare themselves for a long road of tribulation as long as they in the world.
 - Though it is good for us to long for heaven and the glory that God has promised us,
 - we must not always be expecting it to come when our LORD has called us to endure tribulation for Him as long as we are in this world.

TRANS> But now, what about the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem?

- That was the matter had raised the disciples question in the first place...
 - When would that occur?
- The destruction of Jerusalem is the subject that Jesus turns to in verses 15-35, and this is the subject that we will examine today.
 - Jesus shows that the disciples were mistaken to suppose that the destruction of the temple would occur at the end of the world and at His *parousia*.
 - Remember, the word *parousia* is a special word that refers to the personal coming of an important person—
 - a king or noble who does not send an ambassador, but who comes in person.
 - Jesus shows that the destruction of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem will occur long before His personal return—long before His *parousia* at the end of the age.
- Because Jesus' *parousia* at the end of the world is so often confused with the destruction of the temple that occurred in 70 AD,
 - I want to begin this morning by distinguishing these two events.
 - And then, having done that, we will be ready to consider three lessons that we ought to learn from Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem.
- So first, here are:

I. Five differences between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

- A. Difference number 1: The destruction of Jerusalem comes with a specific sign; the end of the world comes without any sign.

1. When we get to verse 15, Jesus has just been telling His disciples all sorts of things that are **not** signs of the end of the world...
 - and these include wars and rumours of wars...
 - but in verse 15, He presents a definite sign of the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - a. He ties it in with what happened in the days of the Greek occupation of Jerusalem when Antiochus Epiphanies, the Greek general, defiled the temple in his efforts to secularise the Jews.
 - Daniel had prophesied of both this Greek abomination of desolation (Daniel 11:31) that had occurred a century and half before Christ,
 - as well as of this Roman (Daniel 9:26-27) one that was to occur in 70 AD.
 - The Roman would be the worst of the two in that it would put a permanent end to sacrifice and offering.
 - b. We can be sure that when Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation, He speaks of the coming of the Roman armies because Luke explains it in the parallel account.
 - Luke 21:20, says:
 - “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies,” followed by the same instructions to flee to the mountains.
 - The Romans armies surrounded the city in AD 67 under Vespasian whose son Titus breached the wall and destroyed the city in AD 70.
2. With this warning giving by our Lord, those who believed Him did indeed flee to the mountains and their lives were spared.
 - But this is not to be confused with the *parousia*—
 - Jesus has already explained that wars and rumours of wars are **not** a sign of the end of the world...
 - And in verse 42, He will again explain that there are no signs of the *parousia*— even his disciples will not know when He is coming.

TRANS> So the first difference is that the time of the destruction of Jerusalem will be known to Jesus’ disciples through a sign, but the end of the world will not be known.

- It will come like a thief in the night without prior warning.
- B. Difference number 2: The destruction of Jerusalem is a local judgement; the end of the world will be a universal judgement.
- In verse 16, Jesus says, “Let those in **Judea** flee to the mountains.”
 - Judea was the place where this judgement would occur...

- When Jesus returns at the end of the world, there will be no particular place—it will be world-wide.
- It would be foolish to tell people to flee from Judea at the end of the world because the place they fled to would be subject to same destruction as Judea or any other place!
 - The fact that they can flee when Jerusalem is judged shows that it is not the same as the final, universal judgement, but is only a local judgement.

TRANS> That is the second difference.

C. Difference number 3: The destruction of Jerusalem will be accompanied by the appearing of many who will claim to be Christ; no such claims will be possible at the end of the world.

1. In verse 22-24, Jesus says that the days of the Jerusalem judgement will be shortened and He warns that at that time, they must not follow those who come forth claiming to be Christ.
 - But when Jesus comes at the end,
 - there can no false claims like this because everyone will see Him and know it is Him.
 - Jesus brings out this distinction in verse 26 & 27...
 - With the Jerusalem judgement, they will be saying that He is in the desert or in the inner room—“Come see Him—he is here or he is there.”
 - But in verse 27 Jesus shows that His *parousia* (he uses the word *parousia* here) will not be like that at all!
 - It will like lightning that flashes across the sky!
 - He won't be hidden away in the desert or in some inner room that someone will have to lead you to!
 - Every eye will see Him!
2. This is very important for us to remember to quickly refute false claims that Christ has come in our day...
 - It's not that He could not come, but rather that when He does come, nobody will have to inform you about it!
 - The whole world will know!
 - It will be as unmistakable as lightening that flashes from one end of heaven to the other!

TRANS So the third difference is that the destruction of Jerusalem will involve false claims that the Messiah has come, but His *parousia* will involve no such claims.

D. Difference number 4: The destruction of Jerusalem will lead to world evangelisation; at the end of the world, there will be no more evangelism.

1. There is room for other interpretations (as if often the case with prophecy),
 - but I would argue that when Jesus says (in verse 31),
 - “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”
 - the angels are His messengers who are sent to preach the gospel to the nations—apostles and missionaries and all preachers of the gospel.
 - The Greek word translated “angel” can also be translated messenger.
2. This interpretation is based on what Jesus is referring to in the two verses before, that is, verses 29-30...
 - Matthew 24:29-30: Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
 - The word “immediately” would suggest that He is not referring to the *parousia* here,
 - but to the time immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem before the *parousia*... that is, 71 AD and following...
 - But what throws a lot of people off is the prophetic/apocalyptic character of Jesus’ words when He talks about the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light and the stars falling.
 - People read that and they say,
 - “well nothing like that happened at the destruction of Jerusalem—this must be talking about the end of the world...”
 - But if you look at the prophets of scripture, you will find that they use the **very same language** to describe the overthrow of kingdoms and nations that occurred in their day (or shortly thereafter)...
 - As Lightfoot says, “Great commotions on earth are often represented under the notion of commotions and changes in the heavens.”

- For example, Isa 13 describes the overthrow of Babylon in Isaiah's day as the stars and constellations of heaven withdrawing their light, and as the Sun and Moon being darkened.
 - Isa 13:10 says:
 - "For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine."...
 - Isa 13:13 adds:
 - "I will shake the heavens and the earth will move out of her place in the wrath of the LORD of hosts..."
 - Yet, Isaiah 13:17 explains clearly that this refers to the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes which occurred a few decades after Isaiah spoke this prophecy:
 - "Behold I will stir up the Medes against them who will not regard silver and as for gold, they will not delight in it."
 - And there are many other examples using this same language.
 - In Isa 34:4-5, that judgement against Edom is described in this way:
 - "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll. All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgement."
 - In Ezekiel 32:7-8, Ezekiel describes the destruction of Egypt as making the sun, moon, and stars dark.
 - Joel uses the very same language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem in Joel 2:30-32.
3. And so my point is that language Jesus uses of a darkened sun and falling stars is perfectly suited to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem,
- And if that is so,
 - then verse 31 speaks of world evangelisation by Christ's ministers of the gospel whom He sends from His throne in heaven.
 - It is true that this could refer to the angels gathering the elect at the *parousia* (which they will do),
 - but at the *parousia*, it will not be only the elect that are gathered, but all persons, both dead and living, in all the earth.
 - And because Jesus says this will happen immediately after the tribulation of those days,

- it seems that He is referring to the overthrow of Satan's hold on the nations and the spread of the gospel...
 - I will have more to say about this later, but for now, see the difference in the destruction of Jerusalem and the *parousia*.
 - After the destruction of Jerusalem, the gospel will spread, but after the *parousia*, men will be sent to their final destiny—the day of opportunity will be over.
 - This is the fourth difference between the *parousia* and the destruction of Jerusalem.
- E. Difference number 5: The destruction of Jerusalem will occur in the present generation; the end of the world will not occur so soon.
- In verse 34, Jesus says very plainly and unmistakably:
 - “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”
 - Then He adds that heaven and earth will pass away sooner than His words should fail...
 - He is telling His disciples that the judgement upon Jerusalem that will see not one stone of the great temple left upon another is coming in their very generation!
 - And so it did—as we have seen—in 70 AD all that Jesus spoke about here was fulfilled.
 - But we have seen that Jesus warns that no one should confuse this judgement on Jerusalem with the end of the world...
 - This is not the end of the world, but the beginning of the spread of the gospel to the nations.
 - When that spread of the gospel is complete, then the end will come.

TRANS> So here are five differences between the judgement of Jerusalem and the *parousia* of Christ.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem comes with a specific sign; the end of the world comes without any sign.
2. The destruction of Jerusalem is a local judgement; the end of the world will be universal.
3. The destruction of Jerusalem will be accompanied by the appearing of many who will claim to be Christ; no such claims will be possible at the end of the world.

4. The destruction of Jerusalem will lead to world evangelisation; at the end of the world, there will be no more evangelism.
5. The destruction of Jerusalem will occur in the present generation; the end of the world will not occur so soon.

II. Now I want you to consider three lessons that we ought to learn from our Lord's teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem.

A. The first lesson: That the Lord brings severe temporal judgements upon His apostate church.

1. In Jesus day, the church had grown very apostate...
 - By "church" I mean the visible church, the assembly of God's people, those who have made a covenant with Him by circumcision in the Old Testament.
 - We have seen recently (in chapter 23) how Jesus had denounced the leaders of the church in His day for their unbelief and wickedness.
 - It is very sad to see the wretched condition into which they had fallen,
 - they were so apostate that they could not recognise their own promised Messiah and chose a murder over Him.
2. You can see from Jesus' prophecies that judgement was going to fall upon the church of His day for this their extreme wickedness.
 - a. God's covenant people often suppose that they are immune to God's judgement.
 - "We go to church," "We are God's people," "Surely He will not judge us."
 - Jeremiah had to contend with such attitudes when he foretold the fall of Jerusalem.
 - The people simply would not believe that God would ever allow the holy city and the temple to be destroyed.
 - Of course, they were wrong.
 - That judgement prophesied did come.
 - The temple and the city were reduced to rubble.
 - Many of God's covenant people perished, and many more were taken captive...
 - And that captivity lasted for 70 years.
 - b. But Jesus shows that the judgement that is coming upon His generation will be far worse than any other!

- 1) The sin of Israel had reached its climax in the rejection of the Messiah whom God had graciously sent to save them!
 - No greater wickedness could be conceived!
 - And because their sin had reached its climax, God's judgement was to reach its climax!
 - In verse 21, Jesus says:
 - "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."
 - He goes on in the next verse to say that unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would be saved!
 - That's how bad it would be!
- 2) Albert Barnes has compiled some quotes from Josephus, the Jewish historian, who describes the horrors that did indeed befall the church of which Jesus speaks:
 - Josephus, in describing it, uses almost the very words of our Saviour. "All the calamities, says he, which had befallen any nation from the beginning of the world" were but small in comparison with those of the Jews. (- *Jewish Wars*, b. i. preface, sect. 4.)
 - He has given the following account of one part of the massacre when the city was taken: "And now, rushing into the city, they slew whomsoever they found, without distinction, and burned the houses and all the people who had fled into them; and when they entered for the sake of plunder, they found whole families of dead persons, and houses full of carcasses destroyed by famine, then they came out with their hands empty. And though they thus pitied the dead, they had not the same emotion for the living, but killed all they met, whereby they filled the lanes with dead bodies. "The whole city ran with blood," insomuch that many things which were burning were extinguished by the blood." - "*Jewish Wars*," b. 6 chapter 8, section 5; chapter 9, section 2, 3. He adds that in the siege of Jerusalem not fewer than "eleven hundred thousand" perished (*Jewish Wars*, b. 6 chapter 9, section 3) - a number almost half as great as are in the whole city of London. In the adjacent provinces no fewer than "two hundred and fifty thousand" are reckoned to have been slain; making in all whose deaths were ascertained the almost incredible number of "one million three hundred and fifty thousand" who were put to death.
 - These were not, indeed, all slain with the sword. Many were crucified. "Many hundreds," says Josephus ("*Jewish Wars*," b. v. chapter 11, section 1), "were first whipped, then tormented with various kinds of tortures, and finally crucified; the Roman soldiers nailing them (out of the wrath and hatred they bore to the Jews), one after one way and

another after another, to crosses, “by way of jest,” until at length the multitude became so great that room was lacking for crosses, and crosses for the bodies.” So terribly was their imprecation fulfilled - “his blood be on us and on our children,” Mat 27:25. If it be asked how it was possible for so many people to be slain in a single city, it is to be remembered that the siege of Jerusalem commenced during the time of the Passover, when all the males of the Jews were required to be there, and when it is estimated that more than “three million” were usually assembled. See Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, b. 6 chapter 9, section 3, 4.

- A horrible instance of the distress of Jerusalem is related by Josephus. The famine during the siege became so great that they ate what the most sordid animals refused to touch. A woman of distinguished rank, having been plundered by the soldiers, in hunger, rage, and despair, killed and roasted her own babe, and had eaten one half of it before the deed was discovered. - *Jewish Wars*, b. 6 chapter 3, section 3, 4. This cruel and dreadful act was also in fulfillment of prophecy, Deu 28:53, Deu 28:56-57.
- Another thing added by Luke Luk 21:24, was, that “they should be led away captive into all nations.” Josephus informs us that the captives taken during the whole war amounted to “ninety-seven thousand.” The tall and handsome young men Titus reserved for triumph; of the rest, many were distributed through the Roman provinces to be destroyed by wild beasts in theatres; many were sent to the works in Egypt; many, especially those under seventeen years of age, were sold for slaves. - *Jewish Wars*, b. vi. chapter 9, section 2, 3.

3. Why do I quote all this?

- a. To show you that just because we are God’s people it does not mean that we are immune to His most severe judgements in this world.
 - In fact, judgement always begins with the house of God...
 - And because we are called into His fellowship and given His gracious promises and His law,
 - we will in fact be judged by an even stricter judgement if we reject Him in the face of all these privileges.
- b. It is far worse to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ and believe not than it is to be an open infidel.
 - I tell you, there are many baptised people in our city that are living in open rebellion against our LORD—in open immorality or dishonesty.
 - There are many that did not bother to go and worship Him today, to seek His face and to praise His name.

- There are many who have gone to worship, but do so idolatrously—worshipping God according to their own desires rather than in accordance with His holy commandments.
- c. And you see, the temptation is to think that God doesn't care about all this and that He won't ever deal with it!
- 1) He has been patient with us for so long in North America that we think His judgement will never come...
 - We think we will just be able to go on in our affluence and comfortable lives and that judgement will never reach us.
 - But this is not so!
 - God's patience with us should not make us so foolish—it ought to break our hearts and lead us to repentance with gratitude!
 - But instead we whine and complain about the minor afflictions He does send to us!
 - And we even wickedly deny Him as the author of our atrocities!
 - We suppose that God had nothing to do with knocking down the twin towers in New York on September 11!
 - Let us learn from what happened to the Jews that God will send things far worse if we don't repent.
 - 2) Jesus indicated in verse 34 and 35 that this judgement upon Jerusalem was sure to come that heaven and earth would sooner pass away!
 - What seemed so far away and so unreal was in fact absolutely certain.
 - Do not think when we are living the way we are living in North America—where the light of the gospel has shone so brightly and we have spurned it—that we can escape God's judgement unless we repent.
 - 3) And let each of you apply this to yourselves individually also!
 - Perhaps today you are here in the church, but your heart is not with us in our worship...
 - You suppose that God will not deal with you because you are here among God's people...
 - But that it is not so!
 - Unless you repent, He will most certainly deal with you, and your judgement will be even more severe for having lived among God's people...

- Now someone will say,
 - But I know many unfaithful baptised persons who have died in peace and prosperity.
 - That may be so, but their peace and prosperity has already come to a very abrupt end!
 - God does not judge all sin in this life, but He most definitely judges all sin.
 - Do not pretend that you or anyone else can escape it without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.
 - What a difference this ought to make in your urgency about your own soul and the soul of those around you!
 - God's judgement is no fiction—it is real and it is certain.
 - Heaven and earth will pass away, but His judgement will come.

TRANS> That is the first lesson—that God will certainly judge and judge severely His apostate people.

- The second lesson is more encouraging...

B. That when He does—when He does bring His judgement—He has a special care for the preservation of His elect.

1. Yes, the Jewish church was apostate in Jesus' day and the Canadian Church is apostate in our day...

a. But God still has His people.

- There is always a remnant according to the election of grace.
- There is always a people whose hearts have been circumcised and who have been baptised by God's Spirit...
 - God's Law is written in their hearts and they love Him and want to please Him in all their ways...
 - They have seen clearly their sin and corruption and have, by God's grace, fled to Jesus for salvation...
 - They are joyfully resting in Him and His finished work on the cross to atone for their sins.

b. There are such people among the visible church in Canada, and there were such people among the Jewish Church in Jesus' day.

- God will always have a people who truly love Him and who have truly received His salvation—
 - even the very darkest days of the church.

2. And I want you to see from our Lord's instruction here that He has a special interest in the preservation of His elect.
 - a. This does not mean that we will not suffer—
 - many times it has been the honour and privilege of the elect to suffer for Jesus sake...
 - They have taken His name into prison camps, before firing squads, into dungeons and tortures and to the gallows.
 - And it has been their great delight to honour Him in these places.
 - And whenever they have done so, it has always been for the advance of their kind—
 - God has used their testimony to lead millions of others to true faith and repentance.
 - Many times their torturers and persecutors have been frustrated because the more they persecute,
 - the more the elect seem multiply.

TRANS> So when I say that God, during His judgements upon a wicked and apostate church, takes a special interest in the preservation of His elect,

- I am not for a moment suggesting that He will ever deprive them of the privilege of suffering for Him as long as they are in this world...
 - He will often give them occasion to do so...
- b. But what I mean is that He will not allow His judgement against an apostate church to harm the elect as it harms the apostates.
 - 1) Look at how urgent our gracious Lord was in urging His disciples to flee to the mountains when they saw the abomination of desolation in the holy place—that is, as we have seen, when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman armies!
 - Jesus says, “Flee to the mountains!”
 - a) He continues in v. 17-18:
 - "Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes."
 - See His urgency and concern for their safety! He tells them to go immediately—without delay!
 - And history tells us that this is exactly what all who received this teaching did when the Romans came—

- God provided an opportunity when the Romans withdrew, and immediately they fled.
 - Most of them went to a place called Pella and it has often been reported that not one disciple of Christ perished in the destruction of Jerusalem!
 - They believed what Jesus had told them and they obeyed—they fled for their lives and were saved.
- b) But look at the tenderness of our Lord for His people...
- In verse 19 and 20 He says,
 - “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.”
 - And do you know, He answered that prayer...
 - They did not have to flee in the winter when travel and survival would have been more difficult—
 - nor on the Sabbath when the gates of the city would have been shut.
 - The Lord made the way for them and brought them all out to safety!
- c) And see yet further how He earnestly warns them not to suppose that the destruction of Jerusalem is the time of His *parousia*...
- It is not.
 - They are warned in verse 23-28 not to follow those who will come along claiming to be Messiah at this time.
 - In verse 28 He describes them as eagles or vultures...
 - They will look upon the destruction of Jerusalem in the same way that vultures look upon the death of an animal in the wilderness...
 - The calamity for them will be an opportunity they will cease upon to deceive many...
 - But in verse 24, our Lord says it will not be possible for the elect to be deceived...
 - Aren't those words “if it were possible extremely comforting—to deceive, **if it were possible** the very elect?”
 - He Himself has instructed them not to follow these deceivers!

- He makes it clear to His elect,
 - (as we have already seen)
 - that when He comes, it will be as clear as when lightening flashed across the whole sky... unmistakably obvious to all!
 - Therefore, all those who come along claiming that Christ is to be found in the desert or in the inner room are deceivers.
 - As I told you last time,
 - Josephus and others tell of thousands who were led astray by such false Christs in these days.
 - But Jesus makes sure that none His true disciples will follow them!

TRANS> And so you see how He looked after His elect and blessed them when their nation was judged even as He looked after Daniel and blessed him (and his friends) in the Babylonian captivity.

- He made what was entirely destructive to the apostates to be a blessing and boon to His people.
 - Not that it was easy to leave their homes and flee, but what a blessing to have their Lord with them when they did and to know that He was looking out for them!
 - He adds in verse 22 that it was for their sake—the elect’s sake—that the days were shortened...
 - If they had not been shortened, the Romans would have gone up into the hills and found every last Jew and seen to it that they were destroyed.
 - But the LORD did not want His church to perish...
 - Just the opposite!
 - He was purging them in order that they might bring forth more fruit!
- 2) Now brothers and sisters, I hope that this gives all of you great confidence!
 - a) If you are among God’s elect, you can be certain that when His judgement falls on the apostate church of North America,
 - He will have the same care for you that He had for His people in Jerusalem.

- He will provide for you so that the judgement that destroys others will not harm you.
 - He will preserve His elect people, and if, in fact, you are appointed to die for Him,
 - it will not be to get rid of you, but to bless you and to add to His church through your testimony.
- b) Of course I am not suggesting that He always works in the same way, but I am saying that He always operates according to the same promised and principles.
- And His promise is that He will bless you and keep you and that no one will be able to snatch you out of His hand.
 - And His promise for the church is that He will build her and that the gates of Hades will not prevail against her.
 - Because He is committed to bless His elect, they will be blessed—
 - it is absolutely certain, no matter how great the judgement may be that falls upon the church.
- c) What better for you then to make your calling and election sure...
- and to urge your children to make their calling and election sure...
 - and to urge your friends and relations and all you meet to come to the Lord in sincere repentance and faith in Jesus...
 - This is the only way to escape the dreadful judgement of God.

TRANS> Now we have two lessons from this passage...

- First, that LORD will surely judge (and judge severely) His apostate church...
- Second, that when He does, He will take special care to preserve His elect...
- And now thirdly, that when He judges His apostate church...

C. He extends His call to those who have not formerly known Him.

1. This is especially the case in the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - a. No sooner did the LORD reject apostate Israel than He began to send His gospel into the world and gather His elect from every nation.
 - This is what Paul speaks about in Romans 11:15 when He says that the casting away of Israel is the reconciling of the world!
 - It is what Jesus spoke about when, in Matthew 21:43, He warned the Jews that “the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.”

- This is what Moses spoke about in Deuteronomy 32 (in the Song of Moses) when He warned that He would reject them and turn to the Gentiles if they continued to provoke Him.
- b. This is what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24:29-31—
- 1) I have already shown you that in verse 29, when He talks about the Sun being darkened and moon not giving its light, and about the stars falling,
 - He is using the apocalyptic language of prophecy to describe the overthrow of existing government—
 - an upheaval in the government of the world.
 - And the great upheaval in the case will be that Israel will no longer be headquarters for His kingdom...
 - The temple on earth will be closed and the temple in heaven will be opened.
 - Headquarters will be transferred from earthly Jerusalem now under judgement to the Jerusalem that is above...
 - a temple made without hands!
 - This is the great change referred to in Hebrews 12 as the shaking of the earth to establish a kingdom that cannot be shaken in the heavens!
 - This is how the book of Hebrews is summed up—
 - It speaks of the end of the temple and the beginning of New Testament worship in Heaven!
 - Listen to Hebrews 12:25-29:
 - Hebrews 12:25-29: “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire.”
 - This is the great change in government at the destruction of Jerusalem of which Jesus speaks when He says the sun will be darkened and the stars will fall.
- 2) In verse 30, He speaks about the sign of the son of Man appearing in heaven.

- This is a reference to His ascent to His heavenly throne as spoken of by Daniel in Daniel 7:13-14.
 - Daniel 7:13-14: "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.
 - Notice that Daniel does not speak of Jesus coming to earth to take dominion, but of going to His throne in heaven to take dominion so that people from all nations and languages should serve Him...
 - In Matthew 24:30, Jesus is saying that the Jews will mourn because they will see the sign of Jesus coming on the clouds—not to earth—but in heaven to take dominion...
 - How will they see it?
 - They will see in their own destruction of their temple and their city...
 - And they will see it in the going forth of the gospel to the Gentiles—to provoke them to jealousy.
 - In others words, they see the reality and fruits of the dominion Jesus was given in their own judgement and in the Gentiles turning to Him from every nation!
 - What Daniel saw from heaven’s perspective they will see from earth’s perspective!
- 3) It is at this time, as Matthew 24:31 shows, that Jesus sent forth His angels—His messengers—to gather His elect in the world!
- The kingdom of God has been taken from Jerusalem on earth and transferred to the Jerusalem that is above...
 - The Jews received to acknowledge it when it was declared to them, but now they mourn because their temple has been destroyed and the Gentiles have come to Christ.
- c. Brothers and sisters, how you ought to rejoice!
- Their rejection has brought salvation to you!
 - And our hope is that in the days to come, God will restore them again that the kingdom of God may be complete!
 - He will not cast off the people whom He foreknew, but will surely graft them in again!

- Let us pray and work for their conversion as well as that of the nations.
- If their rejection has led to our fullness, how much more their acceptance!

TRANS> And so you see how God works...

- And casting away of His apostate people,
 - He extends His mercy to others like never before.
2. And indeed, the same principle applies today.
- a. Whenever God brings judgement upon an apostate church,
 - He brings His gospel to nations that have not known Him.
 - When we grow tired in His service, He turns to others to make us jealous.
 - b. Do we not see this in many ways today in North America?
 - Do we not see the Anglican church established in the third world rising in judgement against the apostate Anglican church in America?
 - Yes, they have even threatened discipline upon them for their unscriptural acceptance of homosexual clergy.
 - And what do we see in general...
 - We see the church growing and flourishing in places like China, Africa and India...
 - and we see it declining in Europe and North America.
 - God is judging us who have known the gospel so long and is raising up a foreign people to serve Him.
 - And in the days to come, He will move the leadership and the wealth and the authority to rule from us to them—
 - to a nation bringing forth the fruits of the gospel that we have lost!
 - c. Let us be broken and humbled for our apostasy.
 - Let us pray and fast and plead for the Lord's mercy upon our people as earnestly as Paul prayed for Israel when he saw their rejection of Christ.
 - Too often, we minimise these things when we ought to rather to be sorely distressed about them.

Conclusion:

I cannot say, as our LORD did, that judgement will fall upon this generation...

- but I can, by the authority of the word of God, say that judgement will fall on us for the way we are living if we don't repent...

- If not on this generation, on a generation to come...
 - Let us not suppose that it never happen to us!
 - Let us be sure that when it does happen, we are numbered among the elect whom our LORD will especially look out for...
 - And let us rejoice to know that gospel will go forward with even more power to a people that have not known the LORD.
 - Blessed be His glorious name!
 - The knowledge of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!