

Session 2

May 1, 2022

KNOW WHAT IS COMING

Matthew 24:15-22

As I mentioned last week, the Scriptures paint the events of the End Times with very broad strokes. The events prophesied in the Old Testament and the New cover a future period of over 1000 years. While scholars differ over particular details of what will happen, when, where, and to whom, most agree in the rapture of the church (at some point), a seven-year tribulation period, the second coming of Christ (either concurrent with the rapture, or after the tribulation) and some form of millennial (1000 year) reign of Christ on earth. The Olivet Discourse describes what will take place in the form of a warning to the complacent and the subsequent encouragement to be prepared. In the words of Adrian Rogers, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.”

Prophecy (v. 15). End Times prophecy is most often fulfilled in stages. There are events that occur in history that fulfill the prophecies in part or in character. Hence, these events are *smaller* fulfillments that *foreshadow* the coming of the full or *ultimate fulfillment*. For example, Jesus here mentioned the *abomination that causes desolation* spoken of by Daniel the prophet. This initially occurred when Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of Syria, captured Jerusalem in 167 BC and sacrificed a pig on the altar. Such a deed was considered unconscionable. But it happened again in AD 70, when Roman soldiers led by Emperor Titus sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Both of these events foreshadow the *real* abomination that causes desolation which will occur in the End Times, when Antichrist sets himself up as a god to be worshipped in the temple (see Dan. 9:27) The parenthetical statement “let the reader understand” (v. 15) is aimed at any reader who would study these things, but particularly to those in the End Times facing the events themselves. For reflection: *What do you think Adrian Rogers meant when he said, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed?” How does one best prepare for the second coming of Christ?*

Urgency (vv. 16-20). Notice the sense of urgency Jesus displays. “*Run for the hills!*” has long been a euphemism for seeking safety as quickly as possible. And that is the meaning here (v. 16). In other words, the region surrounding the holy city would not be spared from the calamities that would come. As examples of the urgency, Jesus said those surprised while on the flat roofs of the city (which were used for both lounging and traversing above the streets) should make a run for safety from rooftop-to-rooftop without going back down the steps to retrieve their belongings. Workers sensing the danger while out in the fields should drop everything and flee (v. 18). In both cases, Jesus indicated that no personal belongings would be as important as escaping the imminent danger. Verses 19 and 20 reflect a sense of pity for those caught by circumstances. Expectant mothers will be hampered by the physical demands of sudden flight, and nursing mothers will face the burden of escaping while caring for their infants (v. 19). Escape would be difficult in the best of times, but the added hardships of winter and the added attention (and subsequent persecution) brought by traveling on the Sabbath (see Ex. 16:29) would further hamper the believers’ escape. For reflection: *Again, these warnings have a double-application. Within 40 years the city of Jerusalem would be overtaken, and the temple left in ruins. But Jesus is looking even further into the future, during the time of Antichrist and the Tribulation for their ultimate fulfillment.*

Severity (vv. 21-22). Here, Jesus identifies a time of great tribulation. He describes it as unique, “the kind that hasn’t taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again!” (v. 21). This is yet a further indication that these events are in the future and were *not* fulfilled completely in AD 70, as some say (see the various judgments described in Rev. chapters 6-16 to get an idea of what is to come). Verse 22 is not meant as a word of comfort to those saved at the time (*the elect*), but rather reemphasizes the severity of the coming judgment on wicked mankind. The same God Who pours out His judgment in that day will also stop it. Simply put, if He did not, all would perish. For reflection: *How would you answer the skeptic who argues that “God is love?” How do you justify such harsh judgment in the End Times?*