

The Memoirs of Peter
The Future According to Jesus, Part 1
Mark 13:3-37
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Well tonight, we come to a passage of Scripture that is a very challenging one, but one that's filled with promise for the future because it's the future according to Jesus. Even unbelievers love to know and speculate about the future. Whether it's the short term future of what's going to happen in Europe or here in the United States with the economy, or whether it's a long term future, there is an interest in what's coming. From Chinese fortune cookies that promise to tell you something that's going to happen to you, to palm readers, to astrology, there is this fascination with the future.

And even in the Christian community you see a similar kind of preoccupation and interest in the future. For decades, the church as a whole (and this particular church before I came) could gather a crowd by announcing a prophecy conference. Largely, this interest in things future has not waned. In fact, within the last fifteen years, far and away the best-selling Christian books were those in the "Left Behind" series, the sixteen titles I think it was that made up that series. They have sold in the last 15 years 65 million copies.

In 30 A.D. there was this same interest in the future and how the end of the age would unfold. Even Jesus' disciples were curious about what it would be. Look at Mark 13 with me, and let me remind you of the flow of this text that introduces us to Jesus' long sermon about the future. Mark 13: 1:

"As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.' As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?'"

For Jesus and His disciples it's the end of a very long day. Remember, it's Tuesday of the Passion Week. Mark's record of all that transpired on that day begins all the way back in chapter 11, verse 20 and continues through the end of chapter 13, that we're really just beginning tonight. Jesus had spent the early part of Tuesday teaching in the temple courts, answering a series of questions from His enemies intended to trap Him. Huge crowds had gathered for the Passover on that massive 35-acre temple mount. And Jesus had a corner of it in which He was teaching those who had come and were interested in His ministry.

After the questioning from His enemies was over, Jesus launched into His most lengthy and straightforward indictment of the spiritual leaders of the nation. In fact, Matthew devotes an entire chapter to it - chapter 23 of Matthew. Part of His stinging indictment against the spiritual leaders of the nation addressed the way they took advantage of people - the way they took advantage of the poor and the disenfranchised, and especially of poor widows.

After His stinging indictment of them, Jesus walked across that massive temple mount from the open area in the court of the Gentiles where He'd been teaching over to the court of the women. And there He sat down opposite the boxes, the trumpet-shaped boxes that were used for the offering, and He watched. He watched as the rich put in their gifts. And then He watched at the end of chapter 12. He watched as a lone, poverty-stricken widow put in everything she had to live on. It was the absolute fulfillment of what He had just said about how the spiritual leaders of the nation took advantage of the poor and the widows, to their own financial advantage.

Jesus, when He watched that, had had enough. He'd had enough of the spiritual leaders of the nation. He'd had enough of the false religion that first century Judaism had become. He'd had enough of the temple. So late on that Tuesday afternoon Jesus got up from the court of the women. He left the temple mount never to return.

Now it shouldn't shock us, what He says at the beginning of chapter 13, because two days before on Sunday, the day of the triumphal entry, Jesus had made a remarkable prophecy about Jerusalem and its temple. Luke records it for us. Look at Luke 19. This was on Sunday, the day of the triumphal entry. And look at chapter 19, verse 41:

“When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem

you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”

In other words, you didn't acknowledge your Messiah. That was on Sunday.

Then late on Tuesday while Jesus was still in the temple, He added another piece to this puzzle. Look at Matthew 23. Matthew 23 - and this is at the very end of His indictment of the spiritual leaders. Matthew 23:37. So this is while He's still on the temple mount before He goes to the court of the women and watches the poor widow. He says:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Your house is left unto you desolate. That's clearly a prophecy about the whole nation and particularly Jerusalem, but specifically about the temple itself.

Then as Jesus left the temple, later, just a few minutes or hours later on that same Tuesday afternoon, He makes a similar but distinct third prophecy, and that's the one we just read at the beginning of Mark 13: 1, 2. He tells His disciples that that great temple structure is going to be utterly destroyed. As the disciples admired it, Jesus surprised them by prophesying that the massive temple Herod had built which was already almost 50 years in construction (46 years they'd been building it – by the time Jesus said this near the end of His ministry would have been right at 50 years) would be completely destroyed – not a single stone left upon another.

As we saw last time a couple of weeks ago – and if you weren't here, you can go back and catch up – in 70 A.D., just two years after this massive rebuilding project was completed, Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled by Titus and his army to the letter. A Roman soldier who was not authorized to do so started a fire. It began. It burned the temple. And once it started to burn, Titus declared everything should be destroyed. The soldiers tore apart the stones to get at the melted gold that was left over from that amazing structure - not one stone on another.

Now Jesus' explicit prophecy of the destruction of the temple happened as He came out of the temple and was going away from the temple. They probably left the eastern gate of the city and went down and across the Kidron Valley and then wound their way up the Mount of Olives. Just to remind you of the big picture, you can see north here is to your right, and you see where the current Dome of the Rock stands. That's still the temple mount, that massive area that Herod made. Some of the original stones are still there. In fact, that (what's called the Wailing Wall - today the Western Wall) is actually part of that original huge supporting structure that was built to hold the temple on its top where the Dome of the Rock stands today. So that's where it is.

You see the Mount of Olives in the foreground here. And then between, that yellow line, marks the Kidron Valley. Jesus and His disciples would have probably exited out of a gate on the eastern side of the temple mount. As I mentioned to you last time, they have discovered what they think is an older gate from Jesus' time beneath the more medieval eastern gate that stands there today. So He would have exited somewhere on that side.

This is what the Kidron Valley looks like. You can get some idea of the topography. There's the temple mount on the left. And then you have this valley that is there between. They would have come down across that valley and then gone up the Mount of Olives on the right side of the picture there in front of you.

Apparently, when they reached the summit of the Mount of Olives, Jesus and the disciples sat down to rest. Now the Mount of Olives rises about 150 feet higher than the temple mount area. So it provided, if you were seated on the Mount of Olives (and I've been there and looked out over the temple mount as it is today) and you have, would have in Jesus' day, a magnificent view of the temple and the entire temple mount. In fact, here is a photograph from the Mount of Olives looking back across the temple mount today with the Dome of the Rock on it.

So you can see they would have been looking west if it was late in the day. It's possible the sun was setting to the west behind that massive structure. This is more what it would have looked like in Jesus' time. And that temple standing in the center of the temple mount, would have been plated in places with gold and jewels and votive offerings that had been given. There was even a huge grapevine with clusters of grapes six feet tall that were built and paid for by Herod as a gift to the temple. And the temple was covered with those kinds of votive offerings. So it would have been magnificent. As the sun began to set over the Mediterranean in the background, and it came blazing across that temple in the foreground, they would have seen it in all of its majesty, the one Jesus had just said would be destroyed.

It was in that context with this view that four of the disciples (the inner circle, the ones that had been first called) approached Jesus privately for clarification about His remarkable prophecy. Look at verse 3: “As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?’”

As we’ve seen in Mark’s gospel, much of Jesus’ teaching came in response to the questions of His disciples. But this question brought the longest answer Jesus ever gave to one of their questions that’s recorded anywhere in the New Testament. In addition, it is the longest message by Jesus on a single theme in the entire gospel of Mark. And it is Jesus’ longest recorded sermon about the future in the New Testament. Because Jesus, when He spoke these words, was sitting on the Mount of Olives looking back across to the temple mount, this discourse is called the Olivet Discourse. It’s recorded in all three synoptic gospels – here in Mark 13, two chapters in Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 24 and 25) and Luke 21.

Now as we begin our journey through this amazing chapter tonight, it’s important to understand that the Olivet Discourse may be the most difficult passage in the gospels to interpret. D.A. Carson, the great scholar, writes this: “Few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Matthew 24 and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21. The history of the interpretation of this passage is immensely complex.”

I’m a simple kind of guy. And so my job over particularly next, not next Sunday night, it’s our conference, but the following Sunday night is to help bring an overview of clarity and simplicity to it, but it is a complex issue.

I think the key to understanding what Jesus teaches in this passage is knowing what really lay behind the disciples’ question. So tonight, I really just want to lay that foundation. What were the disciples thinking? Next Sunday night’s our conference. Lord willing, two weeks from tonight we’ll begin to look at the sermon itself. I want to begin tonight though by considering a question about the future.

Verse 4: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?” Now notice, you already have here even in Mark’s gospel a hint that they’re really asking two separate questions. The first part of it is likely a question about what

Jesus had just said – the destruction of the temple. When will these things be? And what will be the sign when (and then they add this expression) when all these things are going to be fulfilled?

Now what are they talking about in that question? We learn from the other gospels that the disciples were really asking three distinct but related questions. Here's how Matthew puts it in Matthew 24:3 – “As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen, what will be the sign of Your coming, and what will be the sign, of the end of the age?’”

So in reality as I've marked it there, the disciples were asking Jesus three, as I said, distinct questions but three very much related questions in their minds. First of all, when will the temple be destroyed? When's that going to happen? When will not one stone be left upon another?

Their second question is what are the signs of Your coming? And the third question is what the signs of the end of the age are?

Now as you're going to see in a moment, they didn't see those three distinct events separated by many years. Instead, they saw these three events as ones that would occur in like a staccato fashion, one right after the other. Here's how D. Edmond Hiebert puts it: “*These things* (that expression) relates to the temple, but the question assumes that the destruction will be part of complex events culminating in the consummation of the age and the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom.” So they're looking at it as a package. The question is straightforward, but its meaning is more complex than it first appears.

To appreciate the full meaning of their question, we really have to not only look at the question itself, but we have to look at the common view about the future in the first century. Where were they coming from? What were they thinking? To really appreciate their question and the heart of what they were asking, we've got to get inside their heads a little bit because we know that in the first century there was already a defined eschatology. Don't be afraid of the word “eschatology.” It simply means the study of last things.

There was already in their mind a defined order of events for the end of time. And when they heard Jesus prophesy the destruction of the temple, what they're doing is: their minds are worrying. They're trying to place what Jesus has just told them about the destruction of the temple into their theological framework. How does this fit? How does this work?

So again, to really understand what they're asking, we have to back up and understand their view at that time, the wider view of the end of the age. So I want to do that with you in the time we have tonight. I just want you to kind of get inside their heads with me a little bit and understand where this question was coming from.

First of all, I think it's important that we go back and look at what the Old Testament, the foundation it had laid because they were thoroughly schooled in the Old Testament. The Old Testament had predicted the Messiah. It began in Genesis 3:15 – there's going to be a person who will come, who will put a final exclamation point to dealing with human sin. A person's going to come – the seed of the woman. When you get to Genesis 12, you learn that it's going to be through one man and his offspring, through Abraham. “Through you (God says in Genesis 12) all of the nations of the earth will be blessed.” And then as Genesis unfolds, you find out that it's not going to be Abraham's son Ishmael; it's going to be his son Isaac through whom this deliverer will come. And then it's not going to be through Esau, the older, but it's going to be through Jacob. When you come to the end of Genesis, the blessing of Jacob, you discern that He's going to come from the tribe of Judah. He's going to come from that particular son of Jacob.

You have to go all the way to 2 Samuel 7 before you learn that within the tribe of Judah, it's going to come through one family – the family of David. He's going to be a descendant of David. You get to Isaiah, and we learn a little more about Him, and we've examined that passage recently so we won't go there. But when you come to Micah, you not only now know that He's going to be a human deliverer but a unique one because He's born of the seed of a woman. He's going to be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, in the tribe of Judah; and then in the tribe of Judah through the family of David, but He's going to be born in Bethlehem.

But what would He do? Well, there are a number of prophecies in the Old Testament that highlight that. One of the most common and popular in the first century was this one from their writings, Jeremiah 23:5,6 – “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, “The Lord our righteousness.”” This is what the Old Testament promised, and this is what they were looking for.

Now, in light of this prophecy and others like it in the Old Testament, the Jews were looking for the Messiah not primarily to be a spiritual deliverer (although that was clear in Genesis 3:15), but

they were looking for a political deliverer, one who would come as a king. Since the Babylonians had captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Jews had essentially lived under foreign occupation. In the time of Jesus, they had already been under the Romans for more than a hundred years which, by the way, makes it really interesting when, in John's gospel, Jesus says that if you, if you're living in sin, you're a slave of sin. And they say, "What do you mean? We're Abraham's children. We have never been a slave to anyone."

Hello – they needed to wake up and smell the coffee because that was a reality even then. And they lived under the expectation that when Messiah came, He would drive out all the foreign powers. He would re-establish the glory of the kingdom of David. They even believed that Messiah would clean up the tribes and identify who was in what tribe so that the priestly line could be absolutely pure and clean.

So it is clear that the Jewish people of the first century understood these prophecies and were living in anticipation of the Messiah's coming. You can see this when you come to the New Testament. They understood the Messiah had been promised, that He was coming, and they were living in anticipation of it. You see it in the Biblical record – early on in Matthew's gospel, you remember, before Jesus was two when the magi showed up and wanted to know where was He that was born King of the Jews. Herod and the leadership of the nation understood that there was going to be a Messiah and where He was going to be born. So this reality was clear.

You come to Luke's gospel – in fact, turn with me to Luke 1 because here you get the view of a godly Jewish man. This is Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist. And once he's able to speak, we hear his hymn of praise. Verse 67:

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people (now notice the kind of redemption he is thinking about in the first part of this hymn). He has raised up a horn of salvation (or deliverance or rescue that means for us) in the house of David His servant – as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old – salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.’”

The first part of what Zacharias anticipated with the coming of Messiah were those promises that they clung to. Now that's true; it just wasn't to happen at His first coming. But he goes on, by the way, in this great hymn to speak of the redemption of sins, the rescue from sins. You'll notice verse 77: He's also coming (Messiah is) "to give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins ...". So he understood both. He just had them both happening in the same visit, in the same coming, and that was very typical of the time.

In Luke 2 you remember the godly woman Anna who was in the temple – she spoke of the Messiah, of Jesus, to all those who were looking for the redemption of Israel. There were people who came and worshiped God as true Old Testament believers who were eagerly anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

In Luke 3:15, we read that the people were excited and hopeful that maybe John the Baptist was the Messiah. Maybe this is the Messiah that's finally came. And so there was this built-up anticipation that Messiah was coming.

In John's gospel you see the same thing. If you read the early verses of John 1: 19 -25, you see that they're wondering: "Is this the Messiah? Could it be? Could this be the Messiah?" In John 1:41, Andrew and Peter as true Old Testament believers, they were anticipating the Messiah's coming, and they were introduced to the real and true Messiah.

In John 4, even the Samaritans were expecting the Messiah. And when Jesus points out the Samaritan woman's sin, she turns things to a theological discussion of the Messiah. They were anticipating His coming. In John 7 you have very clearly the people were anticipating the Messiah's coming. John 12:34 – We have heard from the Old Testament that when the Christ comes, when the Messiah comes, the Christ is to remain forever. So why then are You, Jesus, talking about dying?

So you see then that there was this great expectation that the Messiah was coming as He'd been promised, and that He would come soon. But what exactly did people in the first century think would happen when the Messiah came? What did they think He was going to do? One way we can discover that is by looking at the documents that were written in the four hundred silent years between the Testaments. The last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, wrote about 400 years before Christ. Then you have Christ, who was born somewhere around 4 to 6 B.C. In those 400 years (silent years we call them because there was no prophet from God, no visit by an angel, nothing but silence. During those 400 silent years) There were a lot of religious

documents that were written, not inspired documents, but documents that help us have insight into what the people were thinking as they anticipated Messiah and what He would accomplish. There are three categories of those documents. One of them is the “Apocrypha” that was included in the Septuagint. It’s included, those of you who have a Catholic background, it’s included in the Catholic Bible. It’s not inspired by the way. It wasn’t, even by the Catholic Church, embraced as inspired until the Middle Ages. I dealt with that when we talked about the canon. It was simply a collection of religious documents written by men, but it gives us insight into what people were thinking in that time period.

Another set of documents are the Targums. Because most of the Jews in that period of time no longer spoke Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible was of no use to them. And so they translated the Bible out of Hebrew into Aramaic, which was the language that they spoke there in Palestine at the time. These translations were called Targums. They’re really more like commentaries though. They’re not word for word commentaries (they’re more like) or word for word translations, I should say. They’re like extended paraphrases. And because they’re paraphrases, it essentially helps us see what they were thinking about various passages in the Old Testament.

In addition, during those 400 silent years between the New Testament and the Old Testament, there was a lot of interest in how things would end. There’s a whole body of literature written during those years about what would happen at the end of the age when the Messiah came – the apocalyptic writings.

Now by looking at all of these documents that were written between the testaments, we get a pretty accurate idea of what the Jewish people believed would happen when Messiah finally came. And I just want to briefly take you through that because it will really help you understand the disciples’ question and Jesus’ answer as we unfold it in a couple of weeks.

What did they think He would do? There’s a great work that has put this together. I have it on my shelf and was looking it through this week. It’s actually a six-volume work by Emil Schürer called “A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ.” It’s a massive work with much academic documentation for what was going on in that period of time in the land of Palestine. One of the things it does is rehearse this Messianic expectation. Using all of those intertestamental documents, Schürer explains what the Jewish people of the first century (including most likely Jesus’ disciples) believed would happen at the end of the age when Messiah came. And that’s important for us to understand - the disciples’ question of Jesus and

His response. So let's see if we can get our arms around what most first century Jewish people were thinking about when Messiah comes.

Specifically, the Jews of Jesus' time believed that the end of the world would unfold in a series of events. A series of events that began (and this is from, a list from Schürer's work that's well-documented – it would begin) with a period of great tribulation before Messiah came. This is what the Jewish people of the first century believed. Before Messiah comes, there is going to be a terrible time of tribulation. Daniel 12 introduced them to this idea. Daniel 12:1 says: "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time...." That framed the basis for their belief in this great tribulation that would come.

Here are the words of some of those intertestamental documents. Here's 2 Baruch [48]. It says: "Passion shall seize him that is peaceful; and many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many; and they will rouse up armies in order to shed blood; and in the end, they shall all perish together with them." There's going to be a terrible time.

Another writing, 4 Ezra, says: "The quakings of places, the tumult of peoples, the scheming of nations, the confusion of leaders, and there will be disquietude of princes."

The Jewish Sibylline Oracles say this: "(For heaven shall fall) From heaven shall fall fiery swords down to the earth. Lights shall come, bright and great, flashing into the midst of men; and earth, the universal mother, shall shake in these days at the hand of the Eternal. And the fishes of the sea and the beasts of the earth and the countless tribes of flying things and all the souls of men and every sea shall shudder at the presence of the Eternal and there shall be panic. And the towering mountain peaks and the hills of the giants he shall rend, and the murky abyss shall be visible to all. And the high ravines in the lofty mountains shall be full of dead bodies and rocks shall flow with blood and each torrent shall flood the plain. And God shall judge all with war and sword, and there will be brimstone from heaven, yea stones and rain and hail incessant and grievous. And death shall be upon the four-footed beasts. Yea, the land itself shall drink of the blood of the perishing...."

The Mishnah describes this tribulation period before Messiah comes. It says:

“Arrogance will increase, ambition shoot up, the government turned to heresy. There is no instruction. The synagogue is devoted to lewdness. The wisdom of the learned is hated, the godly despised, truth is absent. Boys insult old men; old men stand in the presence of children. The son depreciates the father, the daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. A man’s enemies are his house-fellows.”

That’s just a sampling. Before Messiah comes, they believed that there would be this time of great tribulation.

Secondly, in response to that, they believed that Elijah would return as a forerunner of the Messiah. This is based of course on Malachi 4. The end of the Old Testament ends with these words:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

They believed Elijah would come as a forerunner. And of course, we’ve already learned from Mark’s gospel that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was the forerunner. But they expected a period of great tribulation and then the return of Elijah as the forerunner.

That would be followed by the appearing of Messiah. The book of Enoch says that before His manifestation on earth, Messiah was hidden and kept with God even before the world was created. But when the preparations are complete, the Messiah will appear. His appearance (and this is interesting) the Messiah’s appearance they believe would be followed by one final attack of hostile powers against God’s people. After Messiah appears, the nations of the world will gather against Israel and Jerusalem for one last attempt at annihilating God’s people.

Again, the Sibylline Oracles:

“The kings of the nations shall throw themselves against this land, bringing retribution on themselves. They shall seek to ravage the shrine of the mighty God.... In a ring around the city, the accursed kings shall place each one his throne

with the infidel people by him. And then with a mighty voice, God shall speak unto all the undisciplined, empty-minded people, and judgment shall come upon them from the mighty God, and all shall perish at the hand of the Eternal.”

4 Ezra says:

“It shall be that when all the nations hear the Messiah’s voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare they have one against the other, and the innumerable multitude shall be gathered together desiring to fight against him.”

That attack would be followed by Messiah’s destruction of those hostile powers. Philo said that Messiah would “take the field and make war and destroy great and populous nations.”

Again, one of the apocryphal books says that “God shall reprove them for their ungodliness, rebuke them for their unrighteousness, reproach them to their faces. And when he has rebuked them, he shall destroy them.”

The book of Enoch says:

“It shall come to pass in those days that none shall be saved ... none shall be able to escape. There will be no iron for war, nor shall one clothe oneself with a breastplate. Bronze shall be of no service, and tin shall not be esteemed, the lead shall not be desired. And all things shall be destroyed from the surface of the earth.”

After Messiah destroyed all of those hostile powers, they believed that He would renovate Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple. Of course, this springs from several Old Testament texts. The book of Enoch tells us that Jews expected that Jerusalem would have “all the pillars new and the ornaments larger than those of the first.”

Some of the writings believe that the existing city of Jerusalem will be renovated and purified. Other Jewish writings of the time believed that a New Jerusalem already exists in heaven, and that when Messiah defeats His enemies, that great city that already exists in heaven, a New Jerusalem, will descend. Remember now, this is Jewish writings between the Testaments.

The seventh event that would unfold when Messiah comes is He would then gather all the dispersed Jews.

The Psalms of Solomon: “Blow ye in Zion on the trumpet to summon the saints.” And it goes on to say: “Stand on the height, O Jerusalem, and behold thy children from the east and from the west, gathered together by the Lord; from the north they come in the gladness of their God. From the isles afar off, God has gathered them.” And it goes on like that.

The eighth event that would follow is that the Messiah would establish His kingdom in Israel and make it the center of the world. Now this also is based on their understanding of the Old Testament. Look at Daniel 2:44. You remember the prophecy of the great kingdoms and empires of the world. Verse 44: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all other (human) kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”

Look over at chapter 7. Little more about this final kingdom – chapter 7, verse 14. You remember in verse 13: “One like the Son of Man came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him (verse 14). To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”

Look at verse 27: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; and His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.”

Out of those verses and others, the Jewish people of the first century believed that when the Messiah came, He would establish a kingdom in Israel and make it the center of the world from which the entire world would be ruled. Isaiah 11:10 –

“... in that day,
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, (speaking of the Messiah).
Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; (that is, all the peoples of earth)...”

Zechariah 14:9 – “... The Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the *only one*, and His name *the only one*.”

The Sibylline Oracles:

“And all the isles and the cities shall say, ‘How doth the Eternal love those men!’
For all things work in sympathy with them and help them. Come, let us all fall
upon the earth and supplicate the eternal King, the mighty, the everlasting God.
Let us make procession to His Temple, for He is the sole Potentate.”

Following the establishment of that kingdom, they believed that the Messiah would renovate the entire world. Isaiah talks about a new heaven and a new earth. The book of Enoch says: “And in that day, I will let My elect dwell among you and will change the heaven and will make it an internal blessing and light; and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause My elect to dwell in it.”

Following the renovation of the entire world, there would be a general resurrection of the dead. Daniel 12:2 talks about that: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”

And that would be followed by the last judgment. And as a result of that last judgment (and again, these are Jewish writings between the Testaments): “The ungodly are cast into the fire of Gehenna for everlasting condemnation, and the righteous and the godly are received into paradise to see the glory of God and His angels.”

Wow! Now think about that list. That’s not a bad eschatology, is it?

But what the Jewish people of the first century did not see is that there were two separate comings of the Messiah with a gap between them. And in fairness to them, it’s hard to see. Let me give you one example. Turn over to Isaiah, Isaiah 61. When Jesus went back to His hometown, Nazareth, during His ministry, He was invited to teach. And He took the scroll and we’re told that He read from Isaiah 61, and this is what He read. Isaiah 61:1 –

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted;
He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord ...”

Jesus closed the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and said: “Today this is fulfilled in your hearing.”

But look at what the next line says: “And the day of vengeance of our God; ...” Now why did Jesus stop before He finished the sentence? Because the first part of it was to be fulfilled in His first coming; the next line was to be fulfilled in His second coming. And so you can’t really be too hard on the Jewish people for not seeing that reality, for not understanding those two comings.

They didn’t understand that the Messiah would come twice with a lengthy time period between the comings. In their minds – here’s what I want you to get, okay? Stick with me. In their minds, Messiah would come only once to earth, and when He came (when He came), all of these eleven events would begin to unfold in immediate, staccato fashion.

Now with that background, think of what the disciples expected. Their view of the end times was no different than their contemporaries. They were convinced now that Jesus was the Messiah. But okay, when Messiah comes, this is what He’s going to do. They already had begun to feel that there was going to be a little bit of a time lag. They weren’t sure all that was coming. Jesus had told them He was going to die. They weren’t sure what that was about. They were very unclear on that to the very end.

And He had hinted that He was going to go away, but they didn’t understand the full implications of that. So they didn’t expect Jesus to leave for a long period of time and then in the distant future to return. So when they ask about the destruction of the temple, their assumption was probably that it was part of maybe that last attack of hostile powers against God’s people. Maybe that’s when it’s going to happen.

When they ask about the signs of Jesus’ coming, they weren’t saying: “We know You’re going to leave for a long time. And oh, by the way, when You come back, what’s that going to be like?” They were really asking: “So when You go away for this short period of time, and when You come back here almost immediately and manifest Yourself to Israel as the Messiah, when is that going to be, and what’s that going to look like, and what are going to be the signs? How will we know?”

They expected all these things to happen simultaneously, and they expected them to happen very soon. When they ask about the sign of Jesus' coming, they weren't asking about the second coming as you and I think of it. That wasn't in their theological grid. The Messiah was only coming once, and He was already there. "So You're here. The end is near. What's going to be the sign in the very near future that You are manifesting Your presence as Messiah and inaugurating Your kingdom?" And by the way, although Jesus is going to correct their thinking in the Olivet Discourse, they still didn't get it.

Read Acts 1. Right before the ascension, what do they say to Jesus? "Are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Is this it?)

Now I'm almost done. I'm sorry I've gone a little late tonight, but I want you just to consider the lessons from their question. It's a remarkable question really, but what are the lessons for us from their question?

First of all, understanding how the story ends is important. Understanding how the story of redemption ends is important. It's fashionable today to downplay prophecy and to talk solely about our agreement with other Christians on the gospel. And I love the gospel. You know, there's "Together for the Gospel" and there's "The Gospel Coalition." Those are great.

But from a Biblical perspective, what you believe about how the story ends is very important. You know 25% of our Bible is prophecy about the future? If God chose to reveal that much prophecy, if one in four verses are somehow prophetic, then it must be important. And look at the ministry of Jesus. This is Tuesday, folks. This is Tuesday of the Passion Week. Jesus is going to die on Friday, and His longest answer to a question, the longest recorded answer to a question His disciples asked Him, is about this issue. It's important.

Secondly, and I've touched on those – secondly, understanding the end affects our lives now. After Jesus taught the disciples about the end of the story (the ending of which they weren't around for by the way), according to Matthew's gospel, Jesus then took exactly the same amount of time, an entire chapter, and said: "Oh, by the way, here are the implications for you today. Here's how you ought to live in light of this today."

Most Biblical prophecy was revealed to people who never personally saw it fulfilled. So why was it revealed to them? Because there are immediate lessons from prophecy that shape our

thinking and our lives today. And as we work our way through this amazing sermon of our Lord, we're going to talk about those.

Thirdly, this is so important – folks, understand that human history is under the control of our sovereign God, and it is moving toward (are you ready for this?) a predetermined end. We say we believe that, but do you really believe that? Do you really believe it when you pick up the paper that none of that is happening by accident – that God is on His throne, He is shaping all of human history to end exactly the way He wants? Jesus said this 2000 years ago, and it's going to happen exactly as He said it would. Are you ready? Jesus could start this whole clock ticking tonight before our heads hit the pillow. Are you ready for the end because it's coming?

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that You would prepare our hearts for the rich study of our Lord's teaching about the future. Lord, as we look in two weeks and begin to really look into His words to us, I pray that You would shape and direct our thinking, that You would help us to learn the lessons that are immediate today, even if we die before it all happens. Lord, help us to learn the lessons that we can learn and that it shapes how we live today. Father, help us to care about the end of the story. Help us to care about this teaching of our Lord as much as we care about the gospel, as much as we love the Sermon on the Mount or the Lord's Prayer.

And Father, I pray that You would help us to be ready. Help us to live in anticipation. Father, I pray for the people here tonight who aren't taking anything in life seriously except the pursuit of their own pleasure, their own desires. Lord, wake them up to the reality that before they go to sleep tonight, the clock of the end may begin to tick. Jesus may come for His own. Father, I pray that You would make us serious about what's coming. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.