

17 THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE N.T. IS THE COMING WAR WITH ROME AD 67-70

Introduction: Surprisingly few people are aware that the New Testament is full of predictions of a coming war with Rome. Without this knowledge, large sections of the New Testament text remain inscrutable. We will examine the book of Matthew* and highlight some of the themes that prophetically point to the coming Roman/Jewish War AD 67-70. The war represented national judgment for hardness of heart toward Yahweh, similar to the national judgments we see in the Old Testament. Those who repented and followed their Messiah were restored to right relationship to Him as well as spared the horrors of the war. (Lk 21:20-22)

1. Like Old Testament prophets, Jesus and John the Baptist called for repentance or the people would be caught up in the "Day of the Lord" i.e. the conflagration that was National Judgment.

- a) When John the Baptist saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Mt. 3:7
- b) John said, "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire." Mt. 3:10
- c) John said, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." Mt. 3:12
- d) "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Mt. 4:17
- e) Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city [city that rejects Jesus]." Mt. 10:15

2. Gehenna, mistranslated "hell", was a symbol of national judgment at the hands of Babylon almost 600 years previously. The reminder of that event, in a yearly commemoration, kept "the Valley of Slaughter", i.e. Gehenna, fresh in Israel's memory. Jesus reminded them they needed to repent and come under the Lordship of their Messiah or they would suffer the same misery. (See article #10 [Hell is not in the Bible.](#))

- a) "Whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna [national judgment]." Mt. 5:22
- b) "it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna [national judgment]." Mt 5:29, 31
- c) "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna [national judgment]." Mt. 10:28

3. When "Woes" and comparison to Sodom were pronounced, it signaled judgment. Jesus echoed the O.T. prophets when he warned of the coming national judgment (AD 67-70).

- a) "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you." Mt. 11:21-22
- b) "You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you." Mt. 11:23-24
- c) There are a whole series of "woes" directed at Israel's leadership which will lead to "desolation." Mt. 23.

4. Another theme of Matthew is the extreme wickedness of the generation that would kill Jesus and persecute the apostles. This was yet another reason for the coming judgment/destruction of the unrepentant.

- a) "You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things... Mt. 12:34-7
- b) But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign." Mt. 12:39
- c) "The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. Mt. 12:39-41
- d) "The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and... someone greater than Solomon is here." Mt. 12:42 e) "Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times! An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Mt. 16:3-4
- f) "Jesus answered, 'Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you?'" Mt. 17:17
- g) "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!" 21:13
- h) "These people... honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." Mt. 15:8

5. Fire was emblematic of Yahweh's wrath against the unrepentant and depraved. It was also the most lethal weapon of war and used liberally during the Jewish-Roman War.

- a) "Gather up the...weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Mt. 13:30
- b) "The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. As therefore the...weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age." Mt. 13:39-40
- c) "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth." Mt. 13:41-42
- d) In the end of the (O.C.) age: "The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." Mt. 13:49-50

6. Several parables tell the story of Israel's degradation and consequent national judgment.

- a) The King gave a marriage feast for His son but the guests refused to come and tortured and killed his servants. Consequently, "When the king heard that, he was furious, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city [Jerusalem]." Mt. 22:1-10 (This is so close to the actual story, you might not call it a parable.)
- b) A man came to the wedding without the wedding garment (Christ's righteousness)... "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; there is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.'" Mt. 22:11-13
- c) Unbelievers in Israel had been given the riches of the Mosaic Covenant and were unfaithful. "For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Mt. 25:30

7. Israel had a long history of resisting a right relationship with God and persecuting the prophets. Jesus told them they would continue with this "tradition" for almost another 40 years when the national judgment would occur. There was time for repentance, but for many, it would be a time of becoming even more recalcitrant enemies of Yahweh and His disciples, killing the Messiah and persecuting His disciples.

- a) "You testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?" Mt. 23:31-32
- b) "Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah...Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation.." Mt. 23:34-36
- c) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate." Mt. 23:37-39
- d) At the trial of Jesus, the people cried, "Let His blood be on us and our children!" Mt. 27:25
- e) Pilate said, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Jn. 19:15
- f) "For he [Pilate] knew that because of envy they had delivered Him [Jesus] up." Mt. 27:18

8. Jesus made it clear that judgment would take place in their lifetime i.e. the first century.

- a) "You see all of these things, don't you? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down." Mt. 24:2
- b) "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will in no way taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom." Mt. 16:27

* The Olivet Discourse (chapter 24) is treated separately in documents #12 & #13

Further study: [We Shall Meet Him in the Air](#) by [Don K. Preston](#), [Samuel G. Dawson](#), [William Bell Jr.](#), [Daniel Rogers](#), etc.