

## Palm Sunday: This Generation – *Matthew 23:29-24:3, 24:34*

**Introduction** – Palm Sunday commemorates the Triumphal Entry of Jesus riding into Jerusalem with crowds rejoicing, waiving palm branches and crying out “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD*” (Matt 21:9, Psalm 118:26). This launches Jesus into His busiest and most fruitful week. In the midst of Passover, He would establish a New Covenant administration with His disciples while declaring the temple and all the Old ceremonial administration “*desolate*” (23:38). Of course, this would culminate in His betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, declaring Him to be the Son of God with power (Rom 1:4). During that final week, Jesus warned *that* generation that it would suffer its greatest defeat, judgment, and destruction for having rejected and crucified the Messiah.

**Jesus Enters Jerusalem: The Context** (Matt 21-23) – After three years of ministry, Jesus enters Jerusalem (21:1-11), goes into the temple and makes a mess (21:12-17). This “cleansing” is followed by the lesson of the hypocritical fig tree (21:18-22) which is obviously a prophecy about Israel. The parables of the Two Sons, the Wicked Vinedressers, and the Unresponsive Wedding Guests (21:28 – 22:14) all point to Israel’s refusal to acknowledge, submit, and obey Jesus (and note 22:7). Multiple questions are asked of Jesus revealing Israel’s teachers’ ignorance of the scriptures they claimed to know, while leading the multitudes astonished at His teaching (22:15-46). This led to the eight woes upon the Pharisees and scribes (23:1-36), a dark parallel to the eight beatitudes of Matthew 5.

**The Final Woe** (Matt 23:29-36) – These hypocrites believe they would not have murdered the prophets like their fathers had and point to the monuments they have made to the prophets as proof (vv29-30). Jesus replies that they are witnesses against themselves (they have murdered John the Baptist and will murder the Great Prophet and Messiah in their midst). They are filling up the cup of wrath (v32). Jesus calls them “*serpents*,” an unmistakable allusion to the original serpent (Gen 3). He calls them “*offspring of vipers*” for they are children of their father, the devil (cf. John 8:44). He explains how they will fill the cup of judgment (v34). This is what they will do, with Jesus, then Stephen, then James, then the bloodthirsty work of Saul of Tarsus and then beyond. 1 and 2 Peter and the writer to the Hebrews, along with other epistles, are written to those who have fled from the persecution of their religious leaders, these Pharisees, scribes, and Jewish authorities. This is fulfilled so that the blood of the prophets from righteous Abel to Zechariah will come upon that generation (vv35-36). What does He mean? The disciples will ask (24:3).

**This Generation** – Throughout Matthew, without exception, “*this generation*” always referred to the wicked Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah (11:16, 12:39-45, 16:4, 17:17). The use here in 23:36 is directly given regarding the scribes and Pharisees Jesus has been condemning, the generation that will have “*all these things*” come upon them.

**“O Jerusalem”** (vv37-39) – Jesus weeps, like Jeremiah, over Jerusalem, His Jerusalem, His generation’s Jerusalem. He came, willing to protect them under His covenant love, but they were not willing. Jesus declares the house (the tabernacle/temple/dwelling place for God and His covenant people) desolate (v38) and leaves (24:1). Again, Psalm 118:26 is quoted, the Psalm sung during His entrance into Jerusalem. But He has been rejected and so He says they will not “see” (discern) Him until they affirm that He is the promised Messiah (v39). Just before Psalm 118:26 is, of course, vv22ff which begin, “*The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*”

**The End of the Age** (24:1-3) – As He departs, the disciples follow Jesus and seem to want Him to notice the magnificence of the buildings that made up the temple complex. Historians of the day note that it was stupendous and while the work would continue until 64AD it already was considered one of the wonders of the world. And in that context, we should begin to place when that final woe and the prophecies to follow would occur. Jesus said that not one stone would be left on another (v2), which prompts the disciples to privately ask Him questions. Some try to take these questions as detached and unrelated questions: “When will this happen (the temple destruction)” and “when will a bunch of other things take place (at a different time far, far in the future)?” But it is far more natural to take their questions related to the same series of events (again, keep 23:29-39 in the conversation).

**First Time Stamp** – The temple was utterly destroyed along with the city in 70AD by Titus, the then Roman general who led the siege of Jerusalem and ordered the walls of the city and the temple to be demolished.

**Second Time Stamp** – 23:36 was fulfilled in this bloody destruction of Jerusalem. The blood of the righteous, the blood of all those previous prophets, and the blood of all the Christians persecuted and martyred by that generation, and especially the murder of their own Messiah, was brought upon that city. Josephus, a Jewish historian who was an eyewitness to the events of the siege, records the horror of the years 68-70AD; it was a time when “the day-time was spent in shedding of blood, the night in fear,” when the whole land “was all over filled with fire and blood”; when the lakes and seas turned red; when the Roman

soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them – at a rate of 500 per day. Over a million Jews were slaughtered and tens of thousands were captured and carried away into slavery. It was the end of that age.

**Third Time Stamp** – Jesus gives many prophecies surrounding the time of this great tribulation (vv4-33) and we do not have time to go through the biblical interpretation of them. But again, the time stamp makes it clear that “*this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*” (v34).

**One More Set of Time Stamps** – John writes in his Revelation of Jesus Christ that he was writing of things which “*must shortly take place*” (Rev 1:1), and that “*the time is near*” (Rev 1:3). He says he is writing as a brother and companion “*in the tribulation*” (Rev 1:9) and ends the entire book saying that these words are faithful and true and “*...must shortly take place*” (Rev 22:6).

**Jesus the Great Prophet** – This sermon will not deal with the details of 24:4-31 except to say there it all can be interpreted using the symbolism of the OT to “see” that these things did happen within one generation, the very generation Jesus was teaching. It all came to pass in and around 70AD. Jesus was a great prophet indeed. And when He came riding into Jerusalem on a colt, He was riding into His victory over those who would reject Him and, in doing so, would bring in the end of their age and establish the Gospel Age to all nations. A Man would ascend to the right hand of God, a new universe and a new temple would govern a new creation.

This interpretation is known as “preterism” which comes from the Latin word meaning “past” as opposed to the “futurist” interpretation which holds that these prophecies remain in our future. In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem was the “*coming of the Son of Man*” Jesus was describing in this chapter (24:29-31). His final “coming” will be at the resurrection of all and remains in our future. In the meantime, we “see” that Jesus has come many times in judgment upon cities and nations (Isaiah 13:10, 34:3-5, Ezek 32:7-8). And He continues to come, every Lord’s Day, to judge His people and to shake the heavens and the earth (Heb 12:25-29). God continues to deal with this world, dismantling old things and establishing new. The Christian church continues to grow through a multitude of eras that often look like defeats. Our God brings new worlds out of old ones, and life out of death.