

Title: 'As it was in the Days of Noah' - Signs of the End of the Age

Relevant Biblical texts:

Matt 24 - 25 : 1-46 [Signs of the End of The Age & the Coming of the Son of Man]

Lk 17:26-27 [the Coming of the Kingdom of God]

Gen 6: 5-8 [a description of mankind & the reason for the Flood]

Gen 6: 9-22 [Account of Noah]

Gen 6:1-8:22 [Account of the Flood]

Gen 9:1-17 [God's Covenant with Noah]

Heb 11:7 [Noah warned by God about the flood]

1 Pet 3:20 [God's patience in the days of Noah]

2 Pet 2:5 [God's judgement on the wicked; God's ability to rescue the godly]

The reference to the 'days of Noah' comes in a lengthy section often referred to as 'The Olivet Discourse' (Matt 24:1 to Matt 25:46) [see also Mk 13:1-37 & Lk 21:5-36] This whole section is about '*Signs of the End of the Age*'.

Reading: Matt ch 24 - starting at Matt 23:37

This section begins with Jesus leaving the Temple and the comments he makes about the building itself which his disciples picked up on in 24:1-2. Once Jesus and his disciples get to the Mt. of Olives, the disciples pick up on Jesus' previous comments by asking two related questions (:3)

Q1. "Tell us, when will these things be"

Q2. "And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

In the minds of the disciples it appears that both issues are connected, though just quite how much they understood, at this stage about the 2nd coming of Christ at the end of the age we can't be sure. After all at this stage, they still rejected the notion that Jesus would be crucified and resurrected!

In this section Jesus gives 5 parables about the 'Parousia': (a Greek word which refers to an 'arrival' or 'appearance') In Scripture this word is used for the 2nd Advent or Coming of Christ. The 5 parables are as follows and are given to demonstrate that 'The Day and Hour (of Christ's 2nd Advent) is Unknown'. They are intended to **alert** believers to '**keep watch**'; '**be ready**' or '**be prepared**', for the next great event in God's programme for the world and the end of history as we know it - ie The End of this Age

The Nocturnal Thief 24:42-44

The disorderly servants 24:45-51

The ten virgins 25:1-13

The varied talents 25:14-30

The sheep & the goats 25:31-46

We are often busy watching world & local events from one or more of the following perspectives: economic, scientific, social, climatic, political & other kinds of events on the world calendar of affairs. But are we ever looking, watching and actively waiting for what is coming on God's calendar of events?

According to Matthews account, Jesus' disciples are interested to learn about what was on God's calendar. They asked Jesus 3 questions (Matt 24:3). 'Tell us the disciples said':

Q1 '**When will this happen**'

Q2a '**What will be the sign of your coming**'

Q2b '**and What will be the sign of the end of the age**'

Note also:

- Similar questions again by the disciples to Jesus about 'times' & dates, when at the occasion of his ascension; "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority". (Acts 1:6-7)
- The Thessalonians believers were also interested to know about 'times' & 'dates', 'Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you (Paul had spoken about this on a previous visit to them) for you know very well (from his previous visit) that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety",

destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant women, and they will not escape' (1Thes 5:1-3)

Jesus' reference to 'the days of Noah' immediately precedes the first of these parables which is about the thief in the night. But before we look into the parables themselves, let's take a look at '**the days of Noah**' first and see what we can learn from them.

Noah first appears on the scene of time in Genesis 5:28: What do we know about Noah:

Noah: known as the man who built an Ark: approx. 450'l x 75'w x 45'h

Noah was the son of Lamech

Noah was the grandson of Methuselah [who lived to 969 yrs. old]

Noah was 500 yrs. of age when he fathered his three sons: Shem, Ham, Japheth.

Noah found favour (Grace) in the eyes of the Lord, was a righteous man, & blameless amongst the people of his time.

Noah 'walked' with God

Noah was a man of Faith, he lived in the fear of the Lord - he believed and obeyed God's Word. [Heb 11:7]

Noah built an Ark in a dry landlocked part of the world, to the saving of his family (8 souls in all) & the condemning of the world & its ways. Note: the family must have had to make their own choice to follow Dad & Mum. A choice to leave everything behind - to leave the world behind - and to step inside the ark, to put their confidence in the Ark and choose another unseen life - a separated life, a life yet to come.

Noah was an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith ie he believed God & believed God's Word.

Noah was warned by God of 'things not yet seen' & he exercised faith (obedience) by his actions. He believed things not yet seen!

Noah was a preacher [to his generation] of righteousness & **warned** the people during 120yrs about the coming judgement of God.

Noah did all the Lord commanded him.

Noah, after the flood, built the first recorded **alter** & worshiped the Lord [Gen 8:20] - **So he built the first Ark & he built the first Alter!**

Noah was honoured by God with an everlasting covenant - a visible lasting reminder of which can be seen these days when it rains - the rainbow.

Q. So what was it about the days of Noah that caused Jesus to use it as a reference & description of the End Times?

Don't be Preoccupied:

It is the difference between being **preoccupied** (ie engrossed or distracted) **or prepared**. What Jesus describes about the 'days of Noah'....'before the flood' sounds pretty much like ordinary every day life. People got on with making their own plans. They were so engrossed with their own lives & living life by their own values, so that God didn't merit any consideration.

Life carrying on as normal - but 'normal' had disintegrated into such a corrupt level of wickedness & evil that God was 'grieved'(pained!) he had ever made mankind (Gen 6:1-8)

Gen 6:5 is one of the Bible's most vivid descriptions of total depravity

people eating & drinking

people marrying & giving in marriage

- this all sounds as though life was going on as normal; nothing abnormal about it. Maybe this is the whole point! And the reason for the reference to these times.

- remember what was also happening at the same time.

- Noah was building an Ark - a **vessel of safety** - a **means of deliverance**, which was a provision of God to **rescue & save** people from Divine judgement.

- At the same time Noah was a **preacher of righteousness** - the **saving message** of God with a **warning**

- Were people guilty of ignoring the 'sign', the man, the 'message', and the 'warning'?

- They had never seen an Ark before; perhaps they had no confidence or trust in the man, his message or his means (ie the Ark)? "How could that vessel save anyone in a flood" (ie the coming judgement)?

- Even if such an event was coming anyway? No one was prepared to trust or believe the man & his message !

Today, who believes in the message of the Cross & its power to save. And who believes in a coming judgment by God upon the world?

1 Cor 1:18-25 'For the message of the Cross is **foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved** it is the power of God.....'Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar?'.....'God was pleased through the **foolishness of what was preached** to save those who believe' (He can't save those who won't believe) Just like a drowning man must trust the rescuer to save him if he is told to reach out his hand or get in the lifeboat. He has the choice: "Be saved or drown"!

God closed the door! It wasn't Noah that pulled the door shut. Note Gen 7:16b '.....**Then the LORD shut him in.**' - the occupants were securely sealed in. Salvation is of the Lord. The believer is saved through faith alone, by grace alone - it is God's doing. 'Shut in' with Christ (Col 3:3) and delivered from the wrath to come.

God will close the door on the day of grace & opportunity when the Bridegroom comes at His 2nd appearance. 'Now is the Day of Salvation' - then it will be too late!

The **Ark bore the storm of God's wrath** which delivered Noah & his family. **Christ bore the storm of God's wrath & judgement on the Cross against our sin to give us a new life.**

Be Prepared:

Noah was *faithful* in preaching the message.

Noah preached the message of righteousness (the Gospel) faithfully.

People were given time to repent - 120 years - , to believe and obey (have faith) in the saving message preached.

God was patient - 'God's patience waited, during the building of the ark' (1 Pet 3:20).

God's patience & kindness is intended to lead us to repentance & salvation (Rom 2:4; 1 Pet 3:15)

Noah's construction of the ark should have awakened people & caused them to turn to God - stop & think - to consider their ways!

Here was a remarkable sign - something never seen before- a man aided by his family members, building a vast boat on dry land, far from the sea, because he had been warned by God about a coming flood of judgement, but they failed to heed the warning.

To 'disobey' is essentially the same as to 'disbelieve'. ('obedience' = faith. Faith = obedience to God (see: Rom 1:5b; 15:18; 16:26)

Be Purified:

What was the reply of Jesus to the disciples questions? They should: 'be ready' (:44); 'Watch out'(:4); 'keep watch'(42); 'watch' (43); 'be faithful & wise' (:45) 'be doing' (:46); 'keep watch' (25:13) ie Be on your Guard - Be Alert & in Constant Readiness!

Group Questions: (week 1/3)

Q1. Should the warning of judgement be an essential aspect of the message of the Gospel today? If not why not? If so, why?

Q2. How crucial do you think it is to be able to read, identify and understand all the signs outlined in Scripture leading up to Christ's 2nd Coming?

Q3. Why is it foolish to try and work out a date for Christ's return? Jesus said he didn't know so we can be sure no one else does.

What should we be doing instead? Patient faith, faithful witness, social involvement.

The Fall of Jerusalem & The End of History: The Olivet Discourse (the 5th & last discourse recorded in Matthews Gospel Matt 24:1 - 25:46)

But notice the end of the preceding chapter (Matt 23:37-39) Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem. "Look your house is left to you desolate". - this means 'abandoned' or 'deserted'. - this speaks not just of the physical condition (ruin) of the city and the temple as of the fact that 'God has departed from it' - just like on other previous occasions when the glory of the Lord was withdrawn from Israel. Jesus is leaving the Temple for the last time & this ends His public ministry. In an earlier generation Jeremiah 12:7 gave a similar warning "*I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance ; I will give the one I*

love into the hands of her enemies" - and this preceded the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 587BC.

Note also the later reference in Matt 24:15 by Jesus to the 'abomination of desolation' or 'the desolating sacrilege' referred to by Daniel the prophet (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)

The Setting & the Questions: (24:1-3)

Jesus leaves the temple and his comments (23:38) seem to symbolise the end of its relevance in the purposes of God. Jesus made an emphatic statement about the future of the temple; *"Truly, truly, I tell you not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"* (24:2) The temple was destined for total destruction. Jesus was foretelling the dreadful events which would be realised in AD70. Hence His words which followed in (24:34) "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened". And confirmed by Jesus in the subsequent words: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"

So, Matt 24:15-22 is particularly concerned with the fall of Jerusalem in AD70.

There was a terrible siege lasting nearly 4 years AD66-70, which involved unimaginable hardships. The city was hard to capture, and was defended with Jewish fanatical zeal. The Roman armies made a sustained attempt to starve the inhabitants into submission. Parents were reduced to cannibalism of the children (24:21-22) The city and the temple were reduced to rubble. The carnage and slaughter was terrible. More than 1m Jews died and circa. 100k were taken into captivity. The Roman emperor Titus and his victory were celebrated and commemorated with the Titus Arch in the Forum at Rome. Jesus' warnings (23:15-21) apply to this period.

Synergy & Shift:

The foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple plus the Parousia at the End of the Age, do seem to have a degree of synergy.

However, the destruction of Jerusalem would signify an end to one aspect of the ministry of Jesus. This event would separate Christianity from Judaism and would at the same time express God's judgement once more on Israel. The 2nd Coming of Jesus at the End of the Age will also mark the end of another aspect of the ministry of Jesus through the church age, in which we current stand. The end of the church age will bring a time of God's salvation for believers but of judgement on the world. Although the disciples appear to assume the two events to be related, judging by their initial question (24:3 with Q1 & Q2a&b) the events are in fact distinct. To distinguish where Jesus ceased to talk about one and began talking about the other is not easy to interpret. There seems to be a combination of statements about the *immediate* and the *long term future*. Some detail seems to apply to the destruction of Jerusalem, some to the 2nd Coming of Jesus and some to both!- this is where the synergy comes in.

The judgement on Jerusalem seems to have elements about it that foreshadow the final judgement to come on the world at the end of the age.

This feature is not untypical of many OT prophesies which have an *immediate sign* which foreshadows *a long term event* e.g. Isaiah told king Ahaz of a sign God would give him, to assure him that the king of Aram would not conquer Judah; 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call his name Immanuel' (Isa 7:14) This was immediately fulfilled in the birth of Maher-Shalal-Has-Baz, who was born to King Ahaz & his wife. But the prophesy is quoted again in Matt 1:20-25 as a prophetic statement about the birth of Jesus. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him what to name the child. This all fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 7:14) Some commentators like to use the analogy of the telescoping of events near and far into one picture, like that of widely separated mountain peaks of historic events which seem to merge and are seen as one.

Challenging as the whole passage may be, I suggest we use the following five divisions which I have come across elsewhere:

The Setting & the Disciples Question (24:1-3)

Jesus has already denounced the Jewish religious leaders (23:1-39) "Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach" (23:3) 7 x "Woes....."

* "You snakes! You brood of vipers!" (23:33)

* "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,...." (23:7)

* "Look your house is left to you desolate" (23:38)

* The temple which was still functioning with its rituals and priests on duty fulfilling their obligations, is actually devoid of any true spiritual content. The religious leaders of the nation

are spiritually bankrupt. The rituals have become detached from the realities they were intended to represent. The rituals have become an end in themselves. It was all down to appearance, like 'whitewashed tombs' (23:27) but God could see through the outward to the inward and the corruption & uncleanness inside.

* The temple may have looked a magnificent building. But when something ceases to fulfil the purpose for which God brought it into being, it is fit only for destruction. What God ordains and blesses as an expression of his purpose becomes redundant when it becomes a substitute for his purpose. This was now the state & condition of the temple, and religious leaders in Jerusalem.

It reminds us of 1Sam:4:21 "Ichabod" - the expression used to denote that the glory of the Lord has departed from Israel.

And the Sermon on the Mount (Matt5:13) when Jesus said "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost its purpose, it gets thrown away".

Overview of Warnings Applying to Destruction of Jerusalem & End of the Age (24:4-14)

Verses :4-14 is one of those sections that seem to have an overlap with the immediate period of time **and projecting forward** towards the End of Age. But Jesus' words (24:34) "*I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened*"- this is referring to that **immediate generation** which would witness the fall and desolation of Jerusalem which occurred in AD70

There are Warnings:

- **About being deceived** - "*Watch Out*" "*Many will come claiming to be Christ*".
- **Against being alarmed** by events - 'wars', international conflicts, 'famines', 'earthquakes', 'persecution', 'betrayal' & 'death of believers', 'apostasy', 'false prophets', an 'increase in wickedness'.

Such events are not markers, staging posts or clues to be used like a date calculator or countdown- calendar by which the 2nd Coming of Christ can be predicted.

Note :(i) "*Such things must happen, but the end is still to come*" (24:6b)

(ii) "**All these are the beginning of birth-pains**"(24:8) All these events **commenced** after

Jesus returned to heaven and **would be experienced by his disciples and the early church** and in various degrees continue until his future Return.

- **About persecution**, being hated, betrayed, put to death, apostasy- "turning away from the faith" - 'the love of many growing cold', due to an increase in wickedness! "But he who stands firm to the end will be saved" ie 'who sees it right through all the way' ie not fall away from the faith.

The disciples at the time and most followers of Jesus since, have been very slow to accept the necessity and inevitability of sacrifice and suffering. Jesus had to work hard at changing the definition of Messiahship in the minds of his disciples. Before the triumph and the glory comes the suffering and the cross! **Per ardua ad astra**, - 'Through trials to triumph'.

The whole conception of the disciples about Christ and his kingdom, was too small, too nationalistic, too materialistic and too earthbound. Remember the rebuke by Jesus to Peter; "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt 16:23) And this maybe the case with many believers today.

Jesus was making it clear to his disciples - both then & others later on - what lay ahead of them. To follow Jesus would be costly: '*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross ('daily'-Lk 9:23) and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it*' (Matt 16:24-25)

This true for all believers through out the whole of the church age right up to Christ's return.

Specific Warnings about Destruction of Jerusalem (24:15-35)

There is something specific in this section, which Jesus tells the disciples they should anticipate. This is "*the abomination that causes desolation*" (24:15) spoken of by the prophet Daniel (Dan 11:31; 12:11). This is pointing to the *desecration* of the Temple and the *erection* of an idolatrous altar by Antiochus Epiphanes (*for identification see SRW notes on Revelation ch 13*) in circa. 169BC when he offered swine flesh in sacrifice in opposition to Jewish worship. Jesus was indicating a repeat of this 'abomination' yet again, within the life time of His disciples. This did in fact take place AD66-70 and would also mark the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus when they erected their standards (bearing the Roman image of Eagles) in the Temple prior to it being destroyed. This was regarded by Jews as an act of idolatry.

Other warnings given by Jesus:

'Flee to the mountains'

'Don't go back for anything'

'Dreadful time for pregnant women & nursing mothers'

'Pray it won't happen in Winter time or on a Sabbath'

'Great distress, unequalled like anything before or after it'

'Ignore the false claims being made by those claiming to be Christ & the false prophets exhibiting signs and miracles'

'Apocalyptic signs in the heavens'

'The Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory': This is reckoned, by some commentators, not to be referring to the 2nd Coming of Christ. Note that the word Parousia (re. 2nd Coming/appearance) is not used in this instance. This is clearly apocalyptic language taken from **Dan 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clues of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed"**.

Some commentators think this statement in (24:30) refers not to a coming to earth but to a coming of the Son of Man into the presence of 'The Ancient of Days' to receive vindication for what He has accomplished in the Cross and to receive authority for all He has achieved - like the entrance of a Victor after the battle! Rather like apocalyptic language to described what is going on behind the scenes in heaven. 'He then sends out his angles (ie 'messengers' as in Revelation) with a loud trumpet call which is the call of the Gospel of Christ going out to the four corners of the earth to gather in believers'.

Josephus, the Jewish historian at the time, wrote an account of this period in his record of the Jewish Wars in which he graphically describes the horrific scenes of starvation, cannibalism, and circa 1million Jewish deaths and 100k who were taken captive.

These events in AD70 marked the end of the Jewish State until it was reborn in 1946.

Timing of Christ's 2nd Coming (24: 36-51)

The distinction between the events in these chapters is that the section referring to the destruction of Jerusalem was **a predictable event** - Jesus made that clear to his disciples at the beginning of the Olivet Discourse and supported it with the parable of the '**lesson of the fig tree**' and his comments made towards '**this generation**' (24:32-35)

However, the emphasis on the 2nd Coming of Christ is quite the opposite. That would be **an unpredictable event**. Jesus made this clear when he said: "**But (or Now) concerning (a better translation) that day or hour, not even the angles in heaven, nor the son, but only the Father knows**". (24:36)

A deliberate shift of emphasis takes the discussion forward by referring back to the beginning of the Discourse and the second part of the disciples question in 24:3 "Tell us, when will this happen (ie the destruction of the temple) and **what will be the sign of your coming (parousia) and of the end of the age**". Unlike the first event which was a predictable one, this event would be **an unpredictable one**.

It was an unpredictable event and 24:36 seems to signal a shift back to the question the disciples asked at the beginning and is confirmed by Jesus in 24:37-39 "As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming (parousia) of the Son of Manthis is how it will be at the coming (parousia) of the Son of Man"

The 2nd Coming of Christ is not something we may work out or pin point - though some have foolishly tried to do so and ended up with 'egg on their face'!

But for sure. We do know Jesus is coming back. His return will see the climax of history and the End of this Age.

The emphasis of the rest of this passage then turns to being prepared 'Therefore....'(24:42-51)

Parables on the 2nd Coming (Parousia) and End Time Judgement (24:36 - 25:46)

- **The Unknown Day & Hour:** (24:36-41) **Preoccupied** - those who are preoccupied and unprepared are oblivious to the treat of the impending judgement of God. Those who are prepared are saved. Those who are unprepared are lost. It is possible to prepare for Christ's Return, not by calculating a date but by responding to the warnings in the Gospel & by living in a state of readiness for Christ's Return. There are two categories of people: the saved

(prepared) & the unsaved (unprepared) and they live alongside each other. The difference will be noticed in the coming Day of the Lord.

- **The Night Time Thief:** (24:42-44) **Expectancy** - *'Therefore keep watch' (24:42) 'The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night' (1 Thes 5:2) 'I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you' (Rev 3:3 Sardis) "Behold, I come like a thief!" Blessed is he who stays awake....'* (Rev 16:15) *"But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare' (2 Pet 3:10)* **Like a night time burglar: Sudden and Unexpected with no warning.**

Like a Pregnant Women: Sudden & Unavoidable with no escape.

'But you, brothers/sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness' (1 Thes 5:5)

- **The Disorderly Servants:** (24:45-51) **Holiness** - *'the faithful & wise servant'... 'whose master finds him doing'.* We don't sit around idly waiting for Jesus to return. The faithful are serving in God's household. And there is a reward for faithfulness from the master.
- **The Ten Bridesmaids:** (25:1-13) **Preparedness:** *'Here's the Bridegroom! Come out to meet to Him'.* This parable further highlights the division between the 'ready' and the 'unready', the prepared and the unprepared. Bridegroom can be interpreted as Jesus, who will come back one day - though no-one knows when - for his bride and a marriage celebration supper. The bridesmaids are Christians and they all looked the same. However, they were not all the same. Only half of them were ready ('wise'), prepared & waiting when the bridegroom finally appeared. The other five were unprepared ('foolish') and missed the bridegroom when he came. Consequently when he came back they found the 'door was shut' and they missed out on the wedding feast. It is possible to have a 'lamp' that looks good, but it has no supply of oil in it!
- **The Varied Talents:** (25:14-30) **Trustworthiness:** *'Well done good & faithful servant'.* The master has gone away and has 'entrusted' his property to his servants. He has given his servants responsibilities - rather like making an 'investment'. What has God 'invested' in us? His Word? His Salvation? His gifts? His Wealth? Are we being trustworthy and faithful with the Master's property. This is how Paul regarded this: 1Cor 3: 5 *'What after all, who is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, But God made it grow.....and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow workers.'*
- **So far these parables have all alluded to judgement. The next one (though not really a parable) concentrates on the judgement itself:**
The Sheep & the Goats: (25:31-46) **Accountability:** *'He will put the sheep on the right & the goats on the left'.* This passage of Scripture looks like a case of justification by works - in support of a social gospel alone. However, at the heart of it is the question of our relationship to the kingdom and the King himself. It appears that it is on this basis that the Son of man (the King) 'seated on his throne in heavenly glory' conducts his judgements. It implies amongst other things:
 - Judgement awaits everyone - that means me. I am accountable for the life & salvation God gave me.
 - Judgement will be impartial
 - At the heart of the Christian faith is a relationship with Jesus himself.
 - It will be based on good works towards other people. Good works are not the cause of salvation but they are the inevitable consequence of salvation.
 - Judgement day is not going to be a theological examination. It is more a question of whether the character of Jesus Christ is evident in the way we live and conduct ourselves.