

Where is the world headed???

- The rich get richer. The poor get poorer...
- The strong, work their whole life, and then they retire, only to grow old and frail and completely dependant on others for everything...
- A man makes a mark – he makes a name for himself, but 40 years later,..., who remembers him?.... What's the point???
- The greedy get ahead, the righteous suffer...
- The ones we love, eventually die, and we will too
- Drought cripples a nation
- Earthquakes flatten cities
- Cyclones and hurricanes devastate....
- Nation rises against nation in war... Airlines get lost... Where's the world headed???

Well, for the godless, the only ultimate answer is “destruction”... Because if you don't believe in God, all you're left with, is the 2nd law of thermodynamics, which says (basically) our whole existence is winding down to a state of equilibrium, and so over trillions of years, instead of having a hot sun and a cold Pluto, heat transference and planetary collisions, will mean that eventually, everything will get to the same temperature, with equal or probably no motion... Basically the system is winding down to entropy... It's winding down, so that all of its energy will be expressed in its simplest form...

And so the godless have all sorts of concerns over the fate of our planet – global warming – climate change – the sun becoming a red dwarf and consuming the earth...

What's the point????

Well I'm here today, to tell you, that history **is** going somewhereⁱ.

- It is **not** meaningless
- It is **not** random
- It is **not** even eternal....
- There **will** be a real end to history, just as there was a real beginning.
- And at that end, we meet Jesus Christ – face to face.

Because it is **His** history. It is **His** plan. **He** is the one who is eternal... And **you** are part of that good, eternal plan.

Now, when it comes to the topic of end times, most people fall into 1 of 2 different categories:

1. For some people it becomes their life – it consumes them... Every moment of their bible study, is spent searching the scriptures for any hint of prophecy relating to end times. And they link it all up with their note books, trying to make sense of it all, so they'll know everything that's going to happen, in

what order... - it consumes them.

2. But there's only a few people like that... The second category (that most of us fall into), is that of avoidance... We don't know that much about it. We don't really **want** to know that much about it. We read a bit of prophecy, and it all seems so elusive... It's hard to understand – it's not clear – it's enigmatic, and so we just close up that book, and move on to something else..

It's like when I pick up a cryptic crossword – my mind just doesn't think like that – I just can't make heads or tails of it... So I look at it for a bit, and I just go, "Oh, that's just ridiculous – I don't get it, and so I throw it away."

You see, prophecy is not intended to give us a detailed picture of the future... It's purpose, is to lift our hearts up in expectancy, so we can make ourselves ready for what is to comeⁱⁱ (even if we don't know **exactly** what that is, or when it's going to happen)...

So sometimes prophecy can be a little bit confusing, if we're wanting to know exactly how and when.

Have you ever seen a car that's been painted with harlequin paint? You look at it from one direction and

you think it's one colour, but from a different angle, it's another colour entirely...

Well, today's reading is a bit like that... It's hard to tell 'what period' it's talking about, and you think it's talking about something that happened shortly after Jesus said it, but you read on a bit further, and you realise it's talking about end times... It all gets a bit confusing... And it all relates around the destruction of the temple...

Let me give you a bit of a history lesson:

- Somewhere in the 7th Century Before Christ, Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem.
- Somewhere in the 6th Century Before Christ, The Prophet Daniel foretold the **desecration** of the temple – he talked about the “Abomination that causes desolation”. He said, “^{11:31} Forces sent by him (talking about an attacking king) shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate.
- We skip forward then 100 off years to 424 years before Christ, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. And the temple **was** destroyed. But then later on Ezra rebuilt it.

- We jump forward now, to 167BC (Before Christ): A Greek King, by the name of “Antiochus Epiphanies”, wanted to consolidate his kingdom, and get everyone on the same page, and to do that, he decreed that everybody should worship Zeus. And of course, the Jews refused to do that, because YHWH has commanded to worship Him, and Him alone.

And so Antiochus Epiphanies, made an effort to break Jewish religion – he outlawed it. He banned its religious practices. And when the Jews rebelled against that, he attacked Jerusalem. In 3 days, 80 000 people were lost – 40 000 were killed and 40 000 were sold into slavery.

And then he marched into the temple. They dedicated the temple to Zeus (set up a statue of Zeus in the temple), and sacrificed pigs and other unclean things on YHWH’s altar, and then, to profane God’s holy temple even further, turned the place into a brothel....

And those who went through all this, saw what was happening, and they looked back to Daniel, and realised “This is the abomination that causes desolation”

- Let's jump forward now, about 200 years: Around the year 33 AD (Just before He was crucified) is when **Jesus** Prophesied about the destruction of the temple (and that's what we read today).
- And today, some people read what Jesus prophesied, and it's so spot-on, to what happened in AD70 (36 years after He said it), that it leads them to believe it was written into the gospels **after** it had actually happened in AD70 – but it wasn't. Jesus said it, 36 years before it happened.... So, what did happen in AD70? It's a big date for Jewish and Christian history...

Well, basically the Jews rebelled against Roman rule... And I think the easiest way to describe it, is to read to you what Michael Green says in his commentary:

It was a terrible siege, lasting nearly four years, and it involved unimaginable hardships. The city was hard to capture, and was defended with fanatical zeal. The Romans made a sustained attempt to starve its inhabitants into submission. Parents were reduced to cannibalism.

(this wasn't the first time that had happened though – it happened years earlier when the Babylonians took Jerusalem)

The city was reduced to rubble. The carnage and slaughter were terrible. More than a million Jews died, and more than 97 000 were taken captive.

Just as Antiochus Epiphanes had brought the abomination that causes desolation into the temple in 168BC when he sacrificed swine's flesh on the altar and turned the rooms of the temple into brothels in a determined attempt to stamp out the Jewish faith, so history would repeat itself. Titus would desolate the holy site even more efficiently by razing it to the ground, and the reader would understand how thoroughly Daniel's prophecy had been fulfilled....ⁱⁱⁱ

And so what Jesus had prophesied, was so accurate, some people reckon it was written in after the fact – but of course, that's just because they don't believe that God controls history...

So, when we read this passage, at one moment, it looks like Jesus is talking about what happened 200 years earlier, when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple. Moments later, it seems like he's talking about the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD70, but then we realise that He's actually talking about the end of time when Jesus returns....

It's a bit like that harlequin paint, where you look at it from one direction, it's one colour, and from another angle, it's different...

Remember what I said before: "Prophecy isn't intended to give us a detailed picture of the future... It's purpose, is to lift our hearts up in expectancy, so we can make ourselves ready for what **is** to come^{iv}"

To make sense of it all, let me tell you this:
Today's reading, is primarily about the end of the world's history. Don't get distracted by thinking that it's all done and dusted in 70AD... It is primarily about the end of the world's history..

The fall of Jerusalem in AD70, was a glimpse of God's judgment, and a glimpse of Daniel's prophecy, as was the 168BC desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. These events, are all connected with the end of the world's history – they shed light on what to expect, when the end **does** come. ... But they are not the end.

You know, I've heard so many people say "*Oh Michael, things are getting so bad, Jesus is going to have to return soon.*"... But I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, things could get a lot worse than they are... It's going to be like it was in Jerusalem in the year 70 – Be ready for it...

Verse 6: **you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.** ⁷ For nation **will** rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and **there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.** ⁸ **All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.**

Someone said to me just the other day, “Michael do you think there are more earthquakes and more world disasters now then there ever has been before?” ... And I said, “I don’t know. I suspect we just hear about it because of the world wide media coverage”. There are very few places where you cannot get cellular or satellite phone and internet coverage. And minutes after an event, the whole world can see what’s happening.

In our age of world-wide media, we hear of wars, earthquakes, floods, droughts, famines.... They’re happening all over the world.... And Jesus said “You **will** hear about these things, **but the end is not yet.**

He said . ⁸ **All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.** – What does that mean???

It might be a bit dangerous, but let me (a mere bloke) tell you about childbirth (I’ve been there you know – I was born):

The beginnings of birth pains, start with discomfort, and every now and then, you get hit with a contraction, and it hurts... But then the birth process continues, and there comes a time when the pain is intense and sustained... But of course once the baby's born, it's all forgotten – it's all worth while...

And for most women, it's not the pain they remember – it's the joy of the child...

History is on its way, to when Jesus returns (and oh the joy of when Jesus comes).

But living as a Christian in this world, is a discomfort – we long to be with Christ now, but for now, we suffer trials; we suffer persecution; we endure hardship...

And every now and then, like a sudden, painful contraction, something happens on a national or even global scale – Earthquake; famine; wars; World Wars.... Are like stabs of pain to the fabric of society.... These are not the end, but like the end....

When these things happen, they should remind us to be ready for when the big one happens.

Now, imagine if a mother to be, felt a stab of a powerful contraction.... What is she to do? "Oh, that was

terrible, I'll have some panadol... and she continues her vacuuming....”

No. When she feels the stab of the contraction, what does she do??? She makes sure she's ready. She gets on the phone: “Hubby, come quick. It's going to happen – get me to hospital”

What should we do when we hear of Earthquakes and famines; and wars; and rumours of wars???? Keep on doing what we're doing???? Absolutely not! We need to make sure we're ready. They are reminders for us, “Jesus is coming. Be ready”

How? How do we get ready, and how do we stay ready?

Well, we get ready by getting right with God. We confess our sins, and receive forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – we stop living for ourselves, and start living for Jesus Christ.... That's what being disciples of Jesus Christ is all about.

And then, how do we **stay** ready?

If you ever want to know the key of what a particular bible passage is trying to tell you, often it's shown in repetition... Did anyone notice repetition in today's reading????

V4: See that no one leads you astray

V5: they will lead many astray.

V10 many will fall away

V11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray

V24 false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

How do we stay ready? We hold on to Christ. We hold on to what is true. We do **not** get led astray. We do **not** fall away.

I'm going to stop there, and next week (no, it's not next week, because next week's palm Sunday, and then it's Easter...). It'll be the 27th when we continue.

And we'll be looking at, "What do we expect – what are the signs of Jesus' return? We'll be considering how we can be led astray, and why would Christians fall away?"

Alright, so 3 weeks time, we'll come back to that.

And I'm not going to ask if you've got questions today, because I know you will, and hopefully we'll answer those in 3 weeks time.

But, if before then, you happen to see in the news, some natural disaster, or news of a war, let that be a reminder to you, to **be** ready, and to **stay** ready.

V30 tells us, when Jesus returns, the tribes of Earth will mourn. Christians will be praising God, but the rest of the world will mourn... Why? Because it'll be too late...

When Jesus instantly returns, like lightning flashing across the sky, and the whole world sees it... It's too late.

See the signs today. Be ready.. And stay ready.

God willing, I'll give you the rest of the message in 3 weeks. But you've got enough now, so that if Christ comes before then, you're good????

ⁱ Michael Green, The message of Matthew

ⁱⁱ Michael Green, The message of Matthew, Page 252

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Green, The message of Matthew, Page 251

^{iv} Michael Green, The message of Matthew, Page 252