

What Does Yeshua Say About the End Times - Part 2

In my last post, we laid the foundation for destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. In this post, we begin to look at Yeshua's revelation of what is to come.

Be Alert to the Signs

"When He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the talmidim came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that you are coming, and that the 'olam hazeh is ending?' Yeshua replied: 'Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. You will hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the 'birth pains.'" Matthew 24:3-8

The **Mount of Olives** rises above Yerushalayim to the east. As Yeshua was leaving the city to return to Bethany for the night, He would have crossed the Kidron Valley, and then He would have headed up the slope of the Mount of Olives. From this slope, He and the talmidim could look down into the city and see the Temple. The prophet Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would stand on that very mountain when He returned to set up His eternal Kingdom (Zechariah 14:1-4). This place evoked questions about the future, so it was natural for the talmidim to ask Yeshua when He would come in power and what they could expect at that time.

The talmidim wanted to understand what Yeshua meant and when this terrible destruction would happen. Their question had two parts. They wanted to know (1) ***When will this happen?*** (referring to the destruction of the Temple) and (2) ***What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*** The second part of their question referred to the Messiah's reign in God's Kingdom. In their minds, one event would occur immediately after the other. They expected the Messiah to inaugurate His Kingdom soon, and they wanted to know the sign that it was about to arrive.

Yeshua gave them a prophetic picture of that time, including events leading up to it. He also talked about far future events connected with the last days and His second coming when He would return to earth to judge all people. As many of the Old Testament prophets had done, Yeshua predicted both near and distant events without putting them in chronological order. The coming destruction of Yerushalayim and the Temple only foreshadowed a future destruction that would precede Yeshua's return.

In order to understand the prophecy, picture yourself standing on a mountaintop looking across a distant mountain range. The mountain peaks appear to be next to each other, while in reality they are miles apart because of the valleys in between. Yeshua's prophecy pictured "mountain peaks" (significant future events), looking to us as though they would occur together, when, in reality, they may be thousands of years apart. Some of the talmidim lived to see the destruction of Yerushalayim in 70 CE, while some of the events Yeshua spoke of have not yet - to this day - occurred. But the truth of Yeshua's prediction regarding Yerushalayim assured the talmidim (and assures us) that everything else He predicted will also happen.

Yeshua first answered the second question about the end of the age and the coming Kingdom. The talmidim wondered what sign would reveal these things, but Yeshua warned them against false messiahs: ***Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! Watch out*** stresses vigilance. We always have to be on guard of the evil that surrounds us. Yeshua knew that if the talmidim looked for signs, they would be susceptible to deception. There would be many false prophets (Matthew 24:24) with counterfeit signs of spiritual power and authority. Yeshua predicted that before His return, many believers would be misled by false teachers coming in His name - that is, claiming to be Yeshua.

Second Thessalonians 2:3-10, which describes a man of lawlessness who will lead people astray, reflects the teaching of this passage. Throughout the first century, many such deceivers arose (see Acts 5:36-37; 8:9-11; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18; 4:1-3).

In every generation since Yeshua's resurrection, individuals have claimed to be the Messiah or to know exactly when Yeshua would return (remember Jim Jones, Sun Myung Moon, and David Koresh?). Obviously, no one else has been Yeshua, and no one has been right about the timing of the Second Coming. According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Yeshua's return will be His unmistakable appearance in the clouds, which will be seen by all people (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7). In other words, believers never have to wonder whether a certain person is the Messiah. When Yeshua returns, believers will know beyond a shadow of a doubt because He will be evident to all.

Yeshua prepared His followers for a difficult passage of time before His return. A key phrase in this verse comforts all believers: **"see to it that you don't become frightened"**. As political situations worsen, as wars ravage the world, Yeshua's talmidim and all His followers should not be afraid that somehow God has lost control or that His promises will not come true. Just as false messiahs and religious frauds come and go, so do political and natural crises. Even when the world seems to be in chaos, God is in control. **"Such things must happen"** are a part of God's divine plan. Note that wars are not a sign of the end. There have always been wars in the world, and will be until the very end. Wars of themselves do not announce the end of the age or the coming of the Lord.

The talmidim probably assumed that the Temple would only be destroyed at the end of the age as part of God establishing His new Kingdom. Yeshua taught that horrible events would happen, **"but the end is yet to come"**. The nations at war and the earth's turmoil, revealed in increased earthquakes and famines, would also not signal the end. Instead, this will be but **"the beginning of birth pains"**; in other words, these will be preliminary sufferings.

Yeshua's words indicated to the eager talmidim that there would be a span of time before the end of the age and the coming Kingdom - it would not come that week, or immediately upon Yeshua's resurrection, or even right after the destruction of Yerushalayim. First, much suffering would occur as a part of life on earth, while history would move toward a single, final, God-planned goal - the creation of a new earth and a new Kingdom as later described in Revelation 21:1-3.

The description of sufferings as **birth pains** is a typical biblical metaphor for the beginning of pre-Kingdom travail and suffering (see Isaiah 13:6-8; 26:16-18; Jeremiah 4:31; 22:20-23; Hosea 13:9-13). While we must never trivialize suffering, all these troubles must not make Believers alarmed. Because Yeshua has warned us about them, we know that they must precede the arrival of God's glorious Kingdom. Preachers on prophecy who count earthquakes in order to determine when Yeshua will return have not read Yeshua's words carefully. Everything will happen according to God's divine plan. Our responsibility is to be prepared, to endure, and to continue to preach the Good News to all nations (Matthew 24:14).

In my next post, we will continue Yeshua's warning about future events leading to the **END TIMES**.