The Beginning of Sorrows Matthew 24:1-14 Pt. 1
By Charles Feinberg

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Charles Feinberg:

This is the first in a series on the Olivet Discourse entitled: Israel in the last days. It's on Matthew 24 and 25 by Dr. Charles Lee Fienberg, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Old Testament at Talbot Theological Seminary. This is the first in a two tape series on the Olivet discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is found in Matthew 24 and 25 this first tape will cover Matthew 24 verses 1 through 35. Now Matthew 24 and 25 contain the longest prophetic discourse of our Lord Jesus Christ parallel passages are found in Mark 13 and in the third Gospel of Luke 21.

Now Matthew 11 with its woes marks one break with the unbelieving in Israel. The invitation in Matthew 11:28, "come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest", that invitation is a general one because it goes out to all who are weary and burdened. Now when the warning was not heeded there in the eleventh chapter, we have in Matthew 23 woes that indicate a more definite break with the unbelieving in the nation. You can find it verses 38 and 39 where our Lord Jesus said, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate and you shall not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord'". The people are told that their house, the temple, is left to them desolate and they shall not see the Messiah again until they say, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". It's against this background of the rejection of the Messiah by his people that we read the following, and "Jesus went out from the temple and was going on his way and His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered and said unto them. 'See you not all these
things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down'. And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately saying, 'Tell us, when shall these things be, and what will be the sign of thy coming and at the end of the age?' And Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name saying, "I am the Christ", and shall lead many astray, and ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that ye be not troubled, for these things must needs come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom and there shall be famines and earthquakes in diverse places. But all these things are the beginning of travail. Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony under all the nations; and then shall the end come.

This important prophetic portion has three distinct parts. The first deals with the pronouncement of doom in verses 1 and 2. When the Lord Jesus went out of the temple in that day, his public ministry was actually concluded. The Lord never returned to the temple. Before that week had ended, he was crucified between two thieves. The way which he now took was the way of the cross, the path of Calvary. At this time his disciples came to show him the buildings of the temple, its cloisters, its pillars, and its walls. Now these could not have been strange to him but they were pointed out now because of his words pronouncing all of it as desolate. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Herod the king used some 18000 skilled workmen in the labor on the Temple. All this beauty and magnificence is to be thrown down, given over to complete
destruction. The Romans demolished the whole city and temple except some trophies. They even
dug up the foundation in 70 A.D. just as had been predicted in Daniel's prophecy in the ninth
chapter and the 26th verse. At first Titus tried to save the temple even after it was set on fire but
he was unsuccessful. He had given orders that the temple was not to be destroyed. And history
tells us, rightly or wrongly, that it was an accident of one of the soldiers that a flaming torch was
thrown in to one of the openings of the temple and it was set on fire. It was impossible to save
the temple. Then Titus ordered that the entire city and temple were to be level except a park
reserved for the garrison. Josephus says, "There was left nothing to make those that came thither
believe it had ever been inhabited.

Now the second section of this remarkable discourse, the greatest prophetic discourse
ever uttered on Earth because uttered by the greatest prophet of all, even our Lord Jesus Christ
the messiah of Israel. This second section of the Olivet discourse speaks of the threefold question
of the disciples in verse 3. When the disciples heard the sad words of condemnation from the
Messiah, they questioned him concerning the time of the destruction, the sign of Messiah's is
coming and the end of the age. Watch those three features: the time of the destruction of the
temple, the sign of messiah's coming, and the end of the age.

Now Scripture tells us that there were certain disciples with him. The four of them who
were with him are indicated in Mark 13 and verse 3. Those who were with him were on the
Mount of Olives when they asked for further word from him. Now the name Mount of Olives
derives from the fact that extensive plantations of olive trees were on that mount. The point of
first interest was the time of the destruction of the temple. This is accurately detailed in another
gospel. It's found in Luke Chapter 21 verses 20 to 23 and it's vital that you read that portion
along with it. Another portion in this gospel of Matthew that should be read is Matthew 22 verse
7. But the details of the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., those details are given in Luke Chapter 21, verses 22-23, the parallel passage to the Oliver discourse in the third gospel. Now remembering that Messiah had spoken before of the coming of the Son of Man in His glory, for instance in the 16th chapter verses 27 and 28 and in the nineteenth chapter verse 28, the disciples desired now more detailed information on this matter. Now the word for coming, Parousia P-A-R-O-U-S-I-A, that word for coming in Greek is peculiar to Matthew in the Gospels. It's confined to this very chapter. Chapter 24. It's found four times, verses 3, 27, 37, and 39, in those four verses.

Now when the subject of the end of the age was presented by them they were thinking not of the Christian age in which we live and they were not living then, but the end of the Jewish age in which they were contemporaries, the very age in which they were living. All is confusion at this point if this be not kept in mind. We need to remind ourselves that the Jewish age has not yet come to an end. It was interrupted by the cutting off of Messiah, Daniel 9 versus 24-27. Now finally the Messiah points out the signs of the times. This is the large section here. The signs of the times in verses 4-14, the beginning of sorrows will be found in this section. This section is dealing with the end of the Jewish age spoken of by Daniel in his prophecy and the very age of which the disciples were asking for further information. It's the beginning of that final period. We have to do with the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. Now verse 15 refers to the middle of that week. Whatever events before that time resemble these things, it's necessary that we see them as foreshadowings. The fulfillment of these things lies ahead of our age. Believers now will not be on Earth. I repeat, believers now, those who are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, will not be on earth to witness these ordeals, the Great Tribulation, in their fullest and terrifying intensity.
For the events here, compare the judgment set forth in Revelation Chapter 6. There is a remarkable correspondence between the two passages. First of all, Messiah predicts the coming of false messiahs, impostors, in verses 4 and 5. The disciples here represent the future godly Jews in the midst of the unbelieving majority and mass of the nation. They are warned not to be led astray because they were liable as such since they had rejected the true messiah, it was our Lord Jesus, himself who said in John 5:43, "I have come in my father's name and you would not receive me. Another will come in his own name", that is to say under his own authority under his own motivation, "another will come in his own name", no other authorization, "and him you will receive". Josephus mentions some. Some who? Why, some false messiahs. Acts speaks of some, some have not realized that that. In acts 5:36 and 37, Acts 8 verses 9 and 10, Acts 21 verse 38, Theudas and others were mentioned in Acts. They were false messiahs. As a matter of fact, up to our day there is a record of some 64 false Messiahs who have tried to lead Israel astray. Some of them were remarkably successful, not totally so, of course. This activity will be intensified in that coming time of which our passage treats. Now sad to say, their deceptions will be successful. We're told the little girl came to her mother once and asked, "Which is worse mother, to tell a lie or to steal?" The mother said, "Both were so sinful, she couldn't tell which was worse". "Well", said the girl, "I've been thinking a good deal about it and I think it's ever so much worse to lie than steal". The mother asked her, "Why my child?" The little ones said, "Well you see Mother it's like this, if you steal a thing, you can take it back unless you've eaten it. And if you've eaten it, you can pay for it. But a lie is forever." Well the lie of the coming false Christs will be.

Then Jesus foretold wars. In chapters Matthew 24, verses 6 and the first part of verse 7. Mankind seems increasingly to be suffering from the rigors of war. No nation on earth is
supposed to be able to support an all-out war with the huge cost of armaments. And they're getting more and more expensive and more refined and more lethal and more death dealing all the time. The burden of taxes for past and present wars keep pressing and there's no end of rumors of wars along with a hot war. They've invented special terms now for these rumors of wars. They are called the war of neuro-psychological warfare, The Cold War. All of this in spite of the Daily Talk of detente or seeking to come to an accord, to a harmony, to an agreement, to a meeting of the minds. So with nation against nation and kingdom arrayed against kingdom, great political revolutions and upheavals are the order of the day. Added to this misery will be earthquakes. And how we are hearing them more often and more destructive than ever before in so many different parts of the world not only on this continent but in other continents as well. Added to this misery will be earthquakes and famines in many places. Oh, how many go to sleep every night of the world with insufficient food having been provided for them during the day and I'm not speaking of adults alone. What is so heartbreaking is that so many little ones are involved. Added to the misery there will be earthquakes and famines in many places. That's the latter part of verse 7 and all of verse 8. With the horrors and devastations of war, the depletion of the soil's strength, the scorched earth policy that is in vogue these days, famines increase, earthquakes increase in severity and they're going to be a great source of terror in those days.

We're told that when Mount Peleé began erupting in May 1932, the editor of a local newspaper tried to reassure a terrified people by stating in his columns that it would probably be a small affair and that St. Pierre, the mountain, would be a safer place than ever for human settlement after the volcano had relieved itself a little. And this is the way he concluded his column.

"Where, then, can we be more secure than in Saint Pierre?" And yet within two days, both the writer and his readers were in eternity and the whole town lay in smoldering ruins. God's
manifestations in nature are not to be trifled with. You may well believe it. They strike the rich, the poor, the high, the low, the famous, and the infamous alike.

At this point in his recital of future events, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, stops long enough to warn them that these things are but the beginning of sorrow. The birth pangs, the literal is, the birth pangs spoken of in other passages of Scripture are meant here. Acts 2:24, for instance, and then in the Old Testament. We have it in Jeremiah chapter 30 verses 4-9. We have it in Daniel 12:1, Hosea 5:15, in their affliction we read there, and Micah chapter 7:1-7. One of the great rabbis, Rabbi Yohanan which is in English John, Rabbi Yohanan said seven years of trouble come before messiah comes. How right he was. The time will be marked by universal hatred, verses 9 and 10, apostates will denounce their believing brethren to their persecutors. Human relationship will mean nothing. These false ones, these whose love has waxed cold, these apostates, these departing ones from the faith will not hesitate to denounce their believing brethren, and anyone in particular, in order to save their own skins. Of course there will be martyrs as well in those days. Revelation 6 indicates that. That cause of such constant and intense persecution, many will fall away from the truth. Oh how persecutions have been used of God through the centuries to purify the church. That's the time when the false is separated from the true, when the spurious and the genuine are seen in their true light. There's a great line of demarcation there as far apart as east is from the west. Internal unity is going to be destroyed. Discord will take its place. Families will be disrupted, homes broken. Suspicion will abound, one turned against the other.

And then verse 11, we read false prophets, those that give false signs and predictions, are going to be eminently successful also. There are going to be many that are just ready to be duped, wanting to believe anything. If one puts it any persuasive way at all, the day's going to be
characterized by widespread apostasy. Verses 12 and 13, in the midst of abounding lawlessness, the professing ones will show their real unconcern for the things of God. The true will continue on and be delivered. This is a word of encouragement for those who have truly trusted Christ. They'll go on to the end of the age and be delivered, delivered from the agonies of that hour. That verse should not be used with reference to salvation today, that "he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved". The saved there is delivered. That's an encouragement for those in that day, a remnant in Israel will go on to the end of the Jewish age and be delivered by the visible appearing of the blessed savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the world to all nations.

Now we don't preach John the Baptist's message. Of course it was a message because of God's grace. All that God has ever done for man since the fall of Adam and Eve is in grace but in this church age there is a fuller display, there is a fuller manifestation of it than ever before. And so I say, we don't preach John the Baptist's message, we don't say, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". And John the Baptist, in all truth and verity didn't preach ours, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved", Acts 16:31. Though both messages, I repeat, issue from the grace and goodness and lovingkindness of God.

So the remnant is going to preach not our message but the gospel of the kingdom. What are they going to be doing? Why these Jewish messengers of the Lord will proclaim far and wide, "Get ready for the King is coming just as John the Baptist ministered". They'll preach as John the forerunner did. The preachers are the ones indicated in Revelation 7, the 144,000 witnesses from all the tribes of Israel. Then, not before that, and then shall come the end of the Jewish age. Thank God that age will not terminate, it will not close, without mercy from God going forth to warn beforehand. It was Lord Guthrie, while studying law in London, used to hear
the great preachers of that city. One Sunday, he listened to three of the greatest. As he walked to church that Lord's Day, he stopped to listen to a street preacher. He was a working man but he did have a gift of utterance. He had a fine simplicity of manner and a remarkable, striking earnestness. After a lapse of years, Guthrie had to confess that he could not recall one sentence which the great men uttered in their pulpits, but there never slipped from his memory a remark from that street preacher. This is what he said, "I have never been to college but I have been to Calvary." These witnesses from Israel shall have been to Calvary and they will go to the end of the earth.

Are you ready, dear reader, that ought to be exed out, Tom. Are you ready, dear listener, are you ready for the coming of the Lord for his own before these woes? Are you ready? What will make you ready? Well you've trusted Christ, that's the readiness you need. And then to keep ourselves in obedience in the will of God, bringing glory to the name of the Lord Jesus. Are you ready dear brother, dear listener? If you are listening and have never trusted Christ as savior, I plead with you, believe now. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart. Believe now, you will be received. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out". As you believe now, you will escape these calamities.

Now in the first section of this prophetic discourse, the Lord Jesus, the messiah, has been setting forth the features of the first part of the Tribulation time for Israel called the time of Jacob's trouble. Now with verse 15, we have arrived at the middle of Daniel's seventieth week and begin the time called the Great Tribulation. Matthew 24, Verse 15-28, we have the great tribulation. The portion reads thus, "When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken out through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them are in Judea flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop
not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not be
turned back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in
those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a Sabbath: for then shall
be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor
ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but
for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is
the Christ, or Here; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christ{s} and false prophets, and shall
show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told
you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness, go not
forth: Behold, he has of the inner chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh forth from
the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. Wheresoever
the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together". That's Matthew 24, verses 15 to 28.
Notice that very arresting attention getting, epigram statement, "Wheresoever the carcass is,
there will the eagles be gathered together".