



The firmament is the division between heaven and earth. It's the marking out of the realm of heaven. And here we have a new heaven realm, divided from the rest of the earth.

Just as God divided the garden of Eden from the rest of the land, so God divides this particular realm within the structure of the tabernacle from the rest of the world. This will be a place where God dwells in the midst of his people in a special way, where he meets with his people. And for that reason, it's separated from the world, and it's structured according to the logic of the original creation, in the same way that we see Eden being.

This chapter begins with the creation of different coverings or drapes for the tabernacle, moves to the actual frame of the tabernacle, and then to the internal veil and the covering of the entrance to the tabernacle, the screen at the entrance. And the materials that are prescribed for the construction actually matter. Bases of silver for the frames, for instance in verse 19, and gold bars and rings at the top.

It's a ladder-like construction, but there's also something more about it that should be noted. It's that movement from silver to gold. And in the next chapter we see that the external surroundings have a movement from bronze to silver.

So there's a different layer, as it were. There's an ascent into God's presence, a movement from bronze to silver to gold. Also the hooks that bind together the covering of the goat skin, outside of the internal covering of the linen, the linen drapes, those are held together by bronze hooks.

And that connection again shows as you move out, there's a movement from gold, which is that which characterizes the interior of the tabernacle. Think about the gold of the Ark of the Covenant or the gold of the lampstand or the gold that's used in the construction of the Table of the Presence. And then to silver that's beyond that and then to bronze.

There is a symbolic ordering to these materials. We'll also see the other materials are important as well. The use of linen and wool, that mixture is an important thing.

Mixtures tend to be associated with things that are special and holy. It's mostly white linen with cherubim on them. And it's similar to the clothing of the priest.

So there seems to be a connection between the priest's garments and the garments of the tabernacle, as it were. The tabernacle is in some senses like a body that's clothed. And the high priest is like a person who's wearing a tent.

And so there's a connection between the house or the tent and the person. And the way that Israel is represented in this tent is important. And we'll get into that more as we look through this.

The drapes inside the tabernacle involve you being surrounded by glorious cherubim and the light of the lampstand. It's like entering into the glory cloud or at least going near to the glory cloud. God's glory presence is nearby in the presence of the Holy of Holies.

And Israel can come near as they eat before his presence. Much as they ate in the presence of God before his throne. They did not have the full access that Moses enjoyed.

But that is what belongs to the realm of the Holy of Holies, the most holy place. Once again we need to remember that the tabernacle is a portable sanctuary, a movable mountain. It's a place where they will encounter God and relate to God as they move around.

It's a vessel in some sense because it's being moved from place to place. It's portable. But it's also a place where God will be especially present in the midst of his people.

It has outer curtains of goat's hair, uses bronze clasps to hold these together. And this exterior structure is less glorious than the internal drapes. Then on top of that there are ram skins dyed red and a sort of durable leather covering on top of that.

We don't know exactly what it was but we know that it was used for sandals. These four levels maybe represent symbolic levels of Israel's life. That internal level connecting very much with the priesthood.

It's the same colour and form of their garments. Maybe the goat's skin layer outside of that is related to the leaders of the people. And then the ram's skin is related to the rest of the nation.

Those who are set apart as representing Israel as the firstborn in the event of the Passover. And then on top of that there is something that is a form of leather that has often been suggested as a sort of leather from the sea. Maybe of dolphins or something like that.

And that would represent the people of the mixed multitude. So there's a movement out in Israel's life. Again there's a movement from a more glorious form to a less glorious form.

Maybe we should also recognise here some image of Sinai itself. Where the external cloud of God's presence was a darkness. And then as you went inside that you got to see the glory of God.

And so that movement is one that Moses makes. But for the people outside it would have looked like a very dark and foreboding place perhaps. And so maybe it's translating that into an architectural structure.

Another thing to notice is we see cherubim here again. We saw cherubim in the Garden of Eden. They were placed there to guard the Garden of Eden after the sin of man.

And here they appear again. This is God's throne room. This is God's palace.

And they are guarding the entrance. They also represent this as the realm of God's special presence. The place where it's dangerous to come in if you're not prepared.

If you're not atoned for. If you're not provided for. There's a dividing veil.

And this partitions the tabernacle into two parts. Once again it's a more glorious material. The way it's described it's not just linen.

It's held together as it were by the linen. But it's primarily characterised by the blue, purple and scarlet yarns that construct it. It should be made again with cherubim skilfully worked into it.

And it involves hooks of gold and bases of silver. So we're seeing similar sort of symbolism here. And the way that the tent represents a different level or movement into a greater degree of glory.

A number of people have suggested that this was probably more of a tent-like structure than many present it. There would be sloping walls. It wouldn't just have a box or rectangular-like shape.

There are ways in which that rectangular shape is part of its construction. But the external part would look more like a tent. God would pitch his tent in the midst of his people.

And a number of the layers, particularly of the external layers, are designed for functional purposes. To ensure that it is protected against the elements for instance, against rain. We also need to bear in mind that many of the details that would be involved in the construction of the tabernacle are not actually given to us.

We have to presume that Moses received some of these things in a visionary form on the mountain. He saw the pattern to use and he was given some sort of verbal pattern. But much of it would also be from memory of seeing the pattern that God had given him.

A question to consider. One of the most defining features of the tabernacle and the later temple is the veil. The veil that divides the most holy place from the holy place.

That partitions this building. And that partition is one that has deep significance. God dwells on the other side of the veil.

The veil divides you from God's presence. God's special presence. But it also allows you to come near.

It allows you to approach without being destroyed because it is a barrier between you and God. In that sense it is a sort of protective hedge. Dividing people from the realm where God's holiness dwells.

How does the reality of the veil provide a metaphor for understanding the religion and the pattern of faith of the Old Testament? And the difference formed by Christ opening up of the veil in the New. Matthew 24 verses 1-28 Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, You see all these, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

As he sat on the Mount of Olives the disciples came to him privately saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And Jesus answered them, See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ. And they will lead many astray.

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed. For this must take place.

But the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death. And you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.

So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house.

Let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days. Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short.

Then if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

So if they say to you, look, he is in the wilderness, do not go out. If they say, look, he is in the inner rooms, do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. A passage in Matthew 24 begins the Olivet Discourse. Once again, there is a change in locality.

And in the story of the Passion Week, there is common movement between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. This happens regularly

throughout the week. And the juxtaposition of the two mountains seems to be important.

The Mount of Olives stands over against the Temple Mount and is the place from which judgment is cast upon the Temple Mount. There is a reference to the Mount of Olives in Old Testament prophecy, in Zechariah 14, verses 3 and following. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah.

Then the Lord my God will come and all the holy ones with him. From such a passage, we can see an association that already existed between the Mount of Olives and the Day of the Lord. A further thing that is extremely important when reading this passage is to recognise the backdrop of the rest of the Book of Matthew.

Throughout the Book of Matthew, it is imperative that we recognise just how imminent judgment is presented as being throughout. It is just on the horizon. In Matthew 10, verse 23, Christ declares that he will not have finished going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

In Matthew 16, 28, some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. In Matthew 23, verse 36, all these things will come upon this generation. The parables are similar.

They anticipate judgment that is very near at hand. This is coming upon the people within that generation. They should be braced for it.

And yet many Christians read these passages as if they were referring to some far distant event, the end of the world itself, rather than the end of the old covenant order. And that is how I will be reading these passages and hopefully help you to understand how they can be read in such a way. Many do struggle to read them as referring to anything that has already happened in history, partly because they don't really grasp the way that biblical imagery works, but also because the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 just does not seem like a suitable contender for the events being spoken about by Christ in these chapters.

It just seems so grand a description of what's about to happen, that the fall of Jerusalem is just a minor event to a backwater nation in the very far distant past. Why should we care about it? Yet, as we understand it properly, we'll see that it is an event of the most immense importance. It's something that stands as a turning point in the middle of human history.

It represents a remarkable change and shift. The chapter begins with the disciples showing Jesus the beauty of the temple and then Jesus declares its imminent fate, after which they come to Him later on and ask what will be the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Jesus begins, actually, by not answering their question, rather by giving things that aren't signs of His coming, to ensure that the disciples don't jump at false positives.

So there will be a number of unsettling events that will occur before His coming, but none of those should be interpreted as a sign that His coming is just about to occur. There will be false prophets and false Christs within and without the Church, famines, earthquakes and other natural disasters. But these are just the beginning of birth pangs.

The birth of a new world order still isn't taking place. There will be a major covenantal upheaval in the order of the world, but that still waits the future. There will be persecution and widespread falling away among self-declared disciples.

The disciples will be brought into the most extreme tribulation. And that tribulation, that time of testing, will reveal men's hearts and cause many to wither. We pray that we will be delivered from temptation, because when we're put into that time of testing, we really have to be proved.

We have to have wisdom as serpents, and we have to have courage and faith that is of a greater scale than that which we usually need. This time will also be disorienting in other ways. There will be treachery and betrayal within the Church.

People will sell their neighbours out, they will sell out fellow Christians to the authorities. And there will also be apostasy and falling away, many people who crumble under pressure. The Gospel will be spread throughout the whole world.

Now the world in question is the Roman world. It's not the globe as such, it's the Roman world. Every single part of the empire, that world order, will receive the message.

And it's at this point that the stage is set for the climactic act. Christ's judgement tarries while the Gentiles are being brought in. And then it falls.

After this, an actual sign of Christ's coming will occur. And that sign is the abomination of desolation that Daniel foretold in Daniel 9, verses 24-27. 70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. The abomination of desolation is the abomination that provokes the desolation of the temple. Not desolation itself as an abomination.

Abominations are typically performed by Israel itself. It's the perversion of the bride, the sin of the bride, not just the sin of the nations. In the Old Testament we can see this in the sin of the sons of Eli, or the idolatry of the nation in Ezekiel's day, or the action with the golden calf.

The abomination of the temple is caused by flagrant sin and or apostasy. And the temple is the marital chamber, the place where God meets with his bride. And now that bed is defiled as it were.

I think a clue here is found in reflecting upon the words of the previous chapter in verses 34-36 and verse 38. Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barakiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate. Reflecting upon the abomination of desolation, it seems to me that it's the filling up of the blood of the saints.

Once that time has come, once they recognise that that condition has been met, they should flee to the mountains if they are in Judea. The one who is on the housetop should not go down and take what is in his house. They should flee.

And this is because the city is about to be destroyed. And if they don't flee, they will be destroyed with it. This is a reminder of the story of Sodom.

Jerusalem is about to face a similar fate. And there's going to be this time of great testing and tribulation. They're going to be pushed to the absolute limit.

It's only because of the elect that God spares them. That He does not push them beyond that limit. He preserves the elect and cuts the days short.

And at that time, there will be all sorts of people leading others astray. False Christs, false prophets, even performing great signs and wonders. And they are to be prepared for this.

They're to recognise the dangers in advance and to take action without hesitation. The coming of Christ and judgement will be like a lightning bolt. It won't be something that comes in gradual stages.

It will be sudden and swift and devastating. And they must be prepared. They must take that action when they have that window of opportunity.

Indeed, this is something that we read that the church did do. The church did escape. And it was saved from suffering the full devastating force of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Where the corpse is, there the vultures or perhaps the eagles will gather. Some have suggested that this might be a reference to the corpse of the rebellion of Israel. And the eagles of Rome preying upon the corpse of Israel.

I think that's a fairly likely interpretation of these words. A question to consider. Within this chapter, we have descriptions of tribulation that's going to come upon the disciples of Christ.

Tribulation that's going to test them to their very limits. And if it were not for God cutting that time short, they would be tested beyond their limits and they would fall too. How does the time of testing work? We have a number of references to it within the book of Matthew.

A number of examples of it. How can we think about the time of testing and its purpose for the church? What are the purposes for which God might bring us into a time of testing? And what might be worked out through it?