

Chapter 24
The Olivet Discourse (23:36–24:35)
(Mark 13; Luke 21)

“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?”” (Matthew 24:3, ESV)

When Will These Things Be?	23:36-24:14
Introduction	23:36-23:39
When?	24:1-24:14
What?	24:15-24:35
And the End of the Age?	24:36-25:13
Noah, Workers, Women	24:36-24:44
Faithful and Evil Servants	24:45-24:51
Wise and Foolish Virgins	25:1-25:13
Final Judgment	25:14-25:46
Parable of the Talents	25:14-25:30
The Son of Man Judging the Nations	25:31-25:46

In many ways the material is rather confusing, however, there are several inclusios in this passage that help bring clarity.

The First Two inclusios, “*all these things*” and “*this generation*” are found in Matthew 23:36 and 24:35. This material addresses the when and the what of the disciples’ question and begins and ends with Jesus telling them that “*all these things*” will come upon “*this generation.*” Therefore, this section addresses the judgment on Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple in the first century, a 3 ½ year period from the spring of AD 67 till August 3, AD 70.

The Third inclusio is found in the phrase “*day and hour*” found in Matthew 24:36 and 25:13 are indicators of the condition of the world right before the coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

A Fourth section found in Matthew 25:14 to 25:46 is a discussion on the final judgment at the end of time. There are two units in this passage, 25:14-25:30 and 25:31-25:46. Each of these two sections ends with a judgment scene:

“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:30, ESV)

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46, ESV)

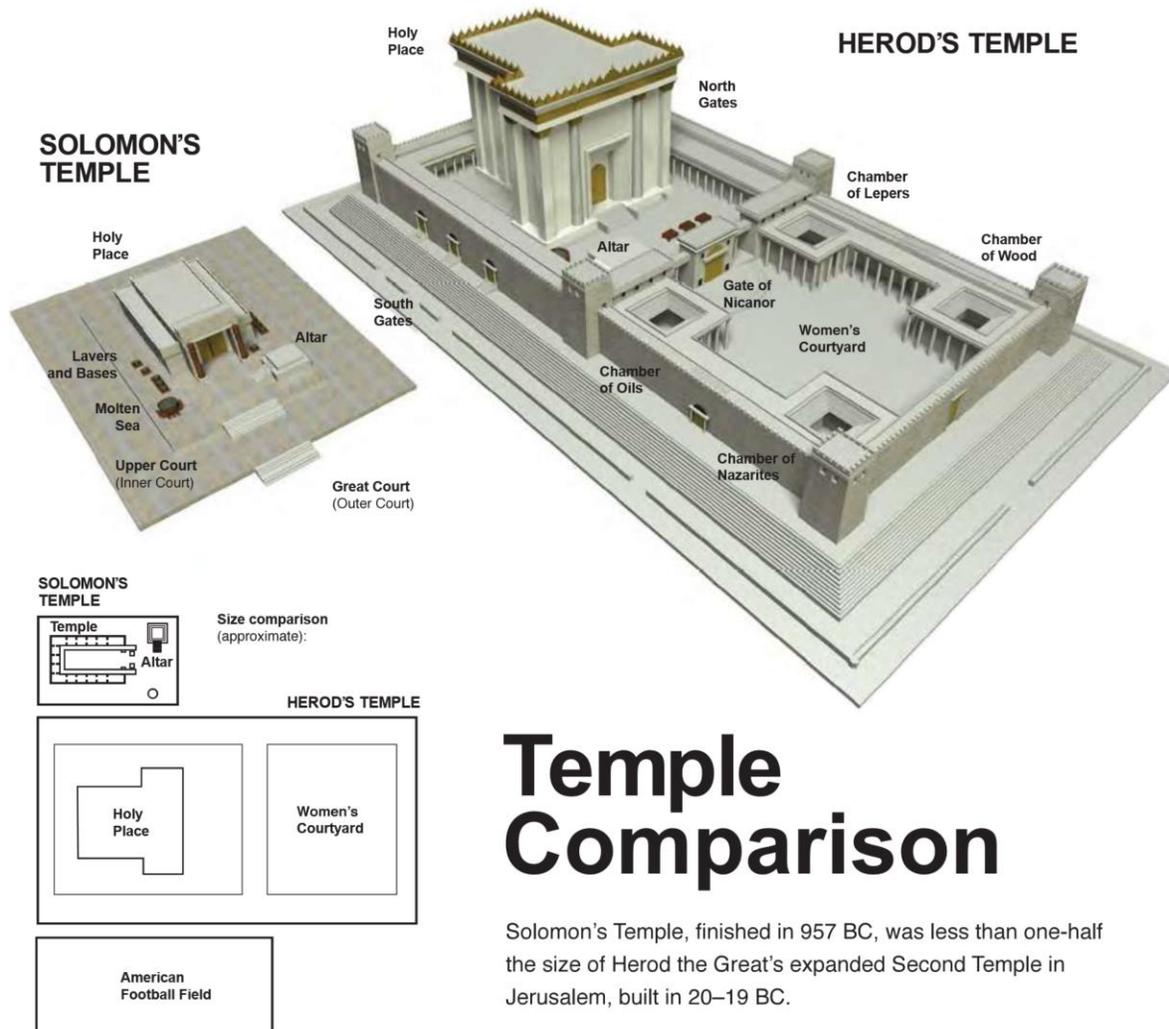
So, we have one section that is clearly a first century prophecy 23:36-24:35, and one section that is clearly a last day prophecy 24:36--25:46.

Another Division

Another position views *all* this material as a prophecy of coming events at the end of the world; it does not seem to have merit. Because the first section (23:36-24:35) is clearly about the destruction of the Temple, one therefore must have two Temple destructions to take this position. Therefore, the first destruction in A.D. 70 would here be ignored by

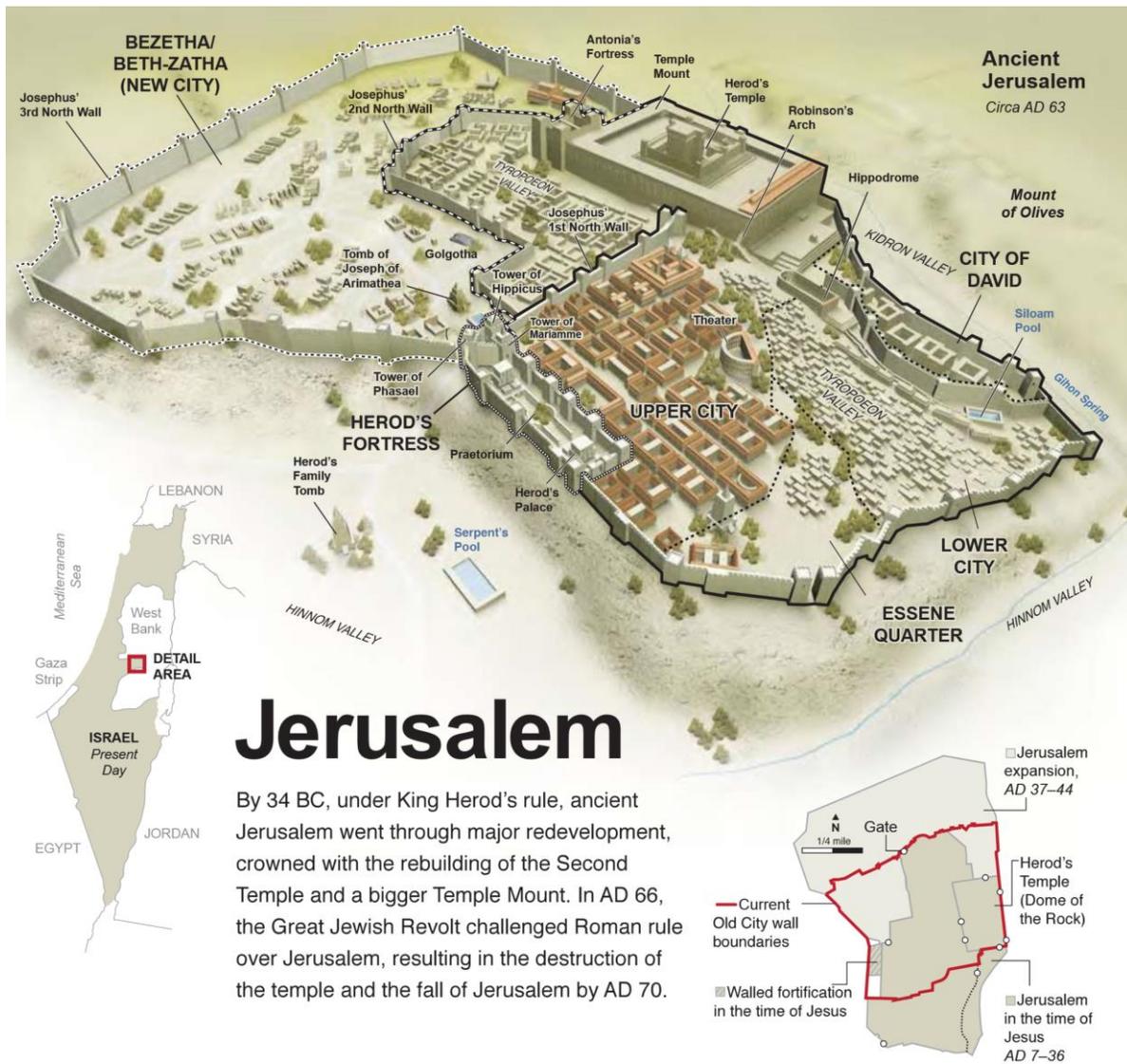
Jesus with a second destruction required to explain his comments. However, since the Temple is already destroyed, those advocating this position, Dispensational pre-millennialists, must then insist that there will be a new Temple built in the future, so that it can then be destroyed according to their interpretation of these verses. Besides being a very convoluted way of doing exegesis, it must insist on something that is simply nowhere found in the Bible, the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple. This explains the hysteria in our day about the rebuilding of the Temple, something never mentioned in Scriptures, but common in Dispensational circles.

Matthew 24:1 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.



Temple Comparison

Solomon's Temple, finished in 957 BC, was less than one-half the size of Herod the Great's expanded Second Temple in Jerusalem, built in 20–19 BC.



Jerusalem

By 34 BC, under King Herod's rule, ancient Jerusalem went through major redevelopment, crowned with the rebuilding of the Second Temple and a bigger Temple Mount. In AD 66, the Great Jewish Revolt challenged Roman rule over Jerusalem, resulting in the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem by AD 70.

GRAPHIC BY KARBEL MULTIMEDIA, COPYRIGHT 2009 LOGOS BIBLE SOFTWARE

Jesus left the temple.... This passage marks the end of a section of material begun with Jesus entering the temple in 21:23.

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.” (Matthew 21:12, ESV)

“And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”” (Matthew 21:23, ESV)

One is reminded of leaving Jerusalem in Ezekiel:

“Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.” (Ezekiel 11:22–23, ESV)

That mountain is the Mount of Olives where Jesus is now heading.

point out to him.... The disciples are impressed by this Temple and are drawing to Jesus' attention its magnificence.

“And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (Mark 13:1, ESV)



the temple.... “Work began in 20 BC, and while the main sanctuary was quickly erected (it was in full operation within ten years), the total project was not completed until AD 64, only six years before it was destroyed by the Romans.”¹

the buildings of the temple.... “Herod first prepared the site by clearing and leveling an area approximately 500 yards (457.2 meters) from north to south and about 325 yards (297.2 meters) from east to west. This involved cutting away sections of rock in some areas and building up with rubble in others. Considerable sections of the enclosing wall, constructed on stone blocks averaging about 15 feet (4.6 meters) long by 4 feet (1.2 meters) high, still survive. Some of the stones in the corners of the south wall weigh up to 70 tons (63.5 metric tons).”²

The reason the disciples came to him to point out the buildings of the temple, was their incredulous response to what Jesus had just said, which was:

“See, your house is left to you desolate.” (Matthew 23:38, ESV)

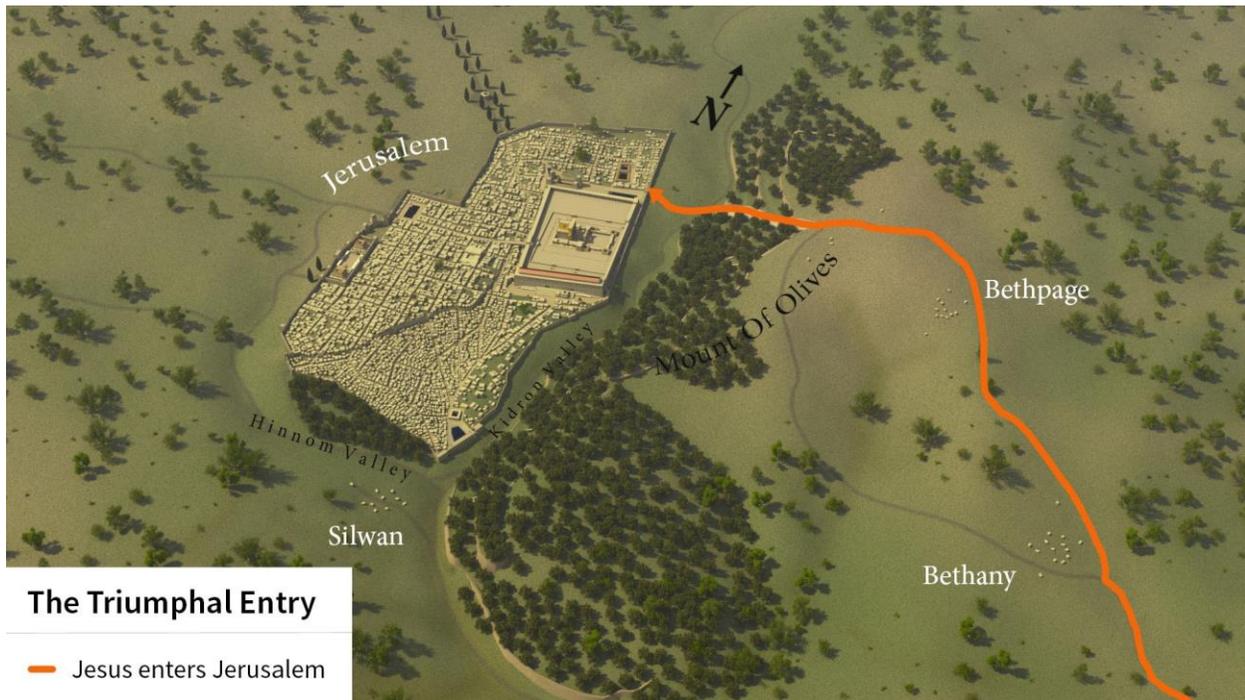
¹ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Jerusalem and especially “*your house*,” that is, the temple, were of a scale that defied understanding. What does this mean “*left to you desolate*”? Jesus begins to explain:

Matthew 24:2 *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.”*

You see all these, do you not? From their vantage point on the Mount of Olives they can clearly see the temple. Their eyes are fixed on the splendor of the temple.



there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. Notice how this statement is stated and then repeated: “*not be left here one stone upon another*” and then he repeats it again, “*that will not be thrown down.*” That sounds rather decisive; yet to this day there still exist the wailing wall 1600 feet long and 100 feet high. “The destruction of A.D. 70, while it utterly devastated the fabric of the temple, did not literally leave no stone on another.”³

³ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 959). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.



So, we must ask, is this a failure of Jesus to truly predict the future? Did he make a mistake? How should we respond to those that use this passage to prove an error in Scripture? There are two things that can be said.

- 1) The existing remnants are of a foundation and outer court of the temple and are not the temple itself—that has all been destroyed.

“...the Roman destruction of Herod’s temple in AD 70 was so complete that all that now remains is part of the substructure of the temple precincts not of the temple buildings themselves.”⁴

- 2) The genre or language that Jesus is here using is known as apocalyptic. The words and phrases in apocalyptic literature are hyperbolic and have a meaning beyond the wooden literalism of individual words. In this case, the meaning is simply “utter destruction.”

These two points suggest that Jesus’ statement was fully accurate.

We should note that this statement was not made in private to his disciples only but in public as he left the temple. Apparently, many others were leaving Jerusalem for the evening and they are in a crowd while this conversation takes place. Why were so many people leaving Jerusalem for the evening? This was the Passover, people from around the Roman world would come in large numbers to feasts like this. Jerusalem could not accommodate crowds of this size. As a result, many sought housing in the

⁴ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 888). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

villages around the city. Countless others camped out in the fields. This is why so many were leaving and were thereby able to hear Jesus say this.

A private conversation would come later in 24:3 “...*the disciples came to him privately....*” In the conversation in verse 2 the disciples are pointing out the temple and its grandeur, but others are listening as Jesus responds and his words are later quoted back to him. “Jesus’ prediction of the physical destruction of the temple plays a significant role in the story of his trial and death: it will be used against him in 26:61 and as a taunt when he is on the cross (27:40). It remained a central charge against Jesus and his movement (Acts 6:13–14).”⁵

“This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’ ” (Matthew 26:61, ESV)

“You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matthew 27:40, ESV)

Even after Jesus death the chief priests, scribes and elders continue to refer to this prophecy in attacking his disciples.

“...and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” (Acts 6:13–14, ESV)

Jesus was bold and public in his denunciation of Judaism, Jerusalem and its religious symbol, the temple. However, it was not the first time he had spoken this way. In parable he said:

“The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” (Matthew 22:7, ESV)

In fact, this is exactly what Matthew 24 is discussing, destroying those murderers and burning their city.

The Beginning of the ‘Labor Pains’ (24:3–8)

Josephus

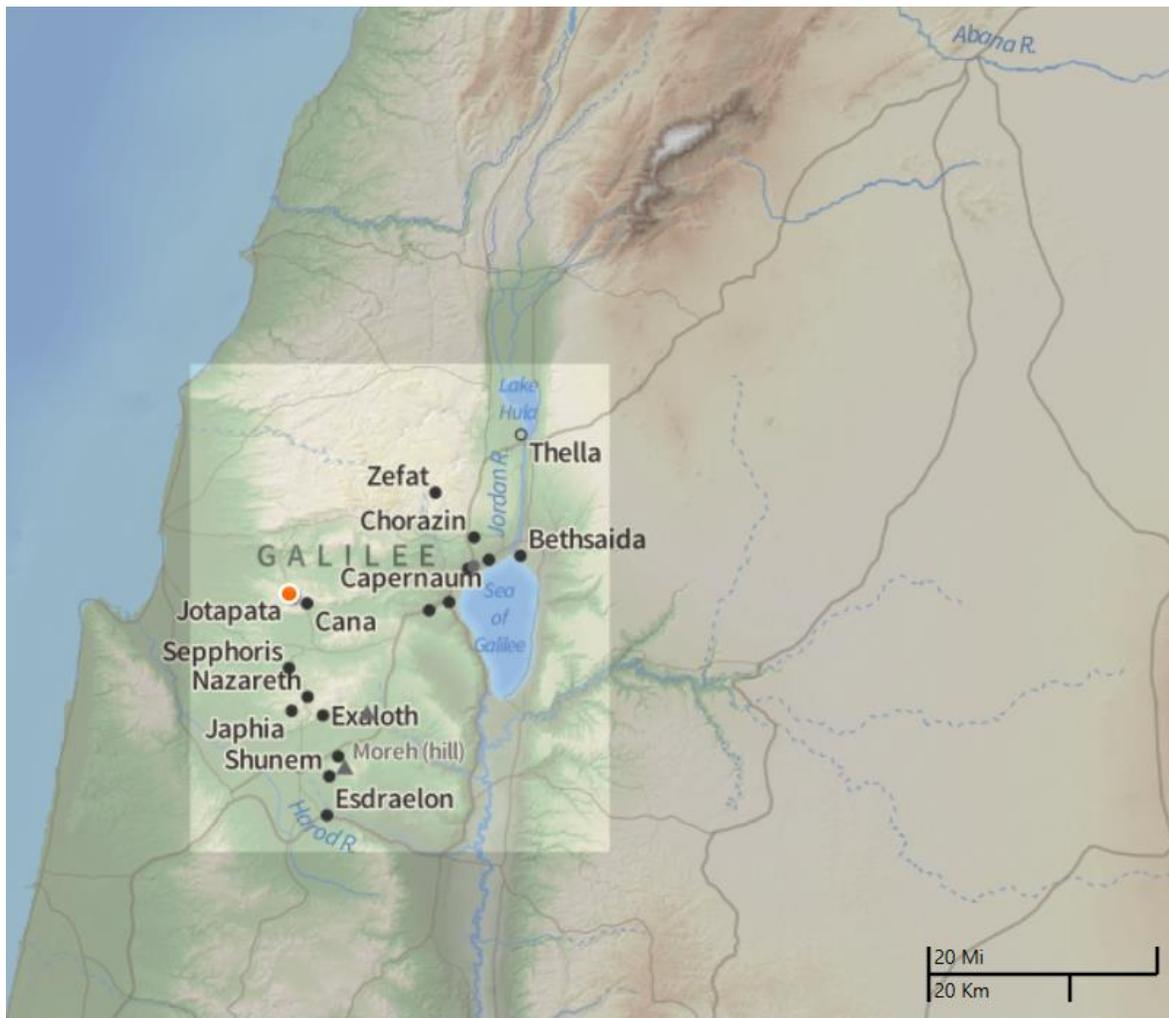
Most of what we know about the life and times of the people of Judea during the time of the New Testament has been preserved for us by the Jewish historian Josephus (c. A.D. 37–100). Josephus was trained as a rabbi and a priest and dabbled in various interpretative schools of Torah before eventually joining the Pharisees at age nineteen. During the Great Revolt he commanded the Jewish forces in Galilee. He was a better scholar than soldier, surrendering the fortress of Jotapata to Vespasian in A.D. 67. After becoming Caesar, Vespasian favored Josephus, released him from his status as prisoner-of-war and granted him the emperor’s family name, Flavius. Josephus eventually traveled to Rome with Vespasian’s son, Titus, the victorious general of the battle for Jerusalem (A.D. 70). There he lived out his years as an author and favorite of the court. Josephus’ primary works, Antiquities of the Jews and The Jewish War, are

⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 888). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

an invaluable, though understandably opinioned, account of the decades of Jewish history that witnessed the destruction of the Temple and the birth of Christianity. This bust is thought to preserve his likeness.⁶



⁶ Wright, P. H. (2012). *Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture* (p. 214). Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing.



The Book of Revelation and Its Relationship to the Olivet Discourse⁴⁹

Before we move on, we should consider the relationship of the Book of Revelation to the Olivet Discourse.

“In Matthew 24, Mark 13:1–37, and Luke 21:5–36 we have what is known as Christ’s Olivet Discourse. Here Christ deals with God’s coming judgement on Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Many theologians have convincingly argued that the Olivet discourse, sometimes called the *little apocalypse*, is the brief version of the Book of Revelation.⁵⁰ Milton Terry says, “The things thus destined to come to pass soon after the composition of this book (Revelation) were in substance the same as those of which Jesus discoursed on the Mount of Olives....”⁵¹ Nor should it be assumed that this view is modern or contemporary for it was utilized as early as the fourth century when the church father Eusebius (A.D. 260–340) used Josephus’s history of the Jewish War (A.D. 67–70) to illustrate the fulfilling of the Olivet Prophecy (*Eccl. Hist.* 3:5–9).⁵² And indeed, the Book of Revelation covers the same material as that of the Olivet Discourse.

⁴⁹ Excellent studies in Matthew 24 include: Gary DeMar, *Last Days of Madness* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 1999), and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1973).

⁵⁰ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1887, 1999), 379.

⁵¹ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 276.

⁵² C. Marvin Pate, Editor, 53.

The Book of Revelation

Revelation 2–3

Deals with false apostles, persecution, lawlessness, love grown cold, and the duty of perseverance

Revelation 4–7 – The Seven Seals

Deals with wars, famines, and earthquakes

Revelation 8–14 – The Seven Trumpets

Tells of the Church's witness to the world, her flight into the wilderness, the Great Tribulation, and the False Prophet

Revelation 15–22 – The Seven Chalice

Describes the darkening of the Beast kingdom, the destruction of the Harlot, the gathering of eagles over Jerusalem's corpse, and the gathering of the Church into the Kingdom

The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24:3–5, 9–13

Deals with false Christ's and prophets, persecution, lawlessness, love grown cold, and the duty of perseverance

Matthew 24:6–8

Deals with wars, famines, and earthquakes

Matthew 24:14–27

Tells of the Church's witness to the world, her flight, the Great Tribulation, and false prophets

Matthew 24:28–31

Describes the same events⁵³

Having demonstrated in general terms how the Olivet discourse and the Book of Revelation parallel, let's look at some specific examples.

BOTH TEACH A SOON FULFILLMENT

First, the urgency in time is similar between the two. Both teach a soon fulfillment of their prophecies.

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Matthew 24:34, NASB95)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.... (Revelation 1:1, NASB95)

BOTH BLEND TWO KEY OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES

Next, the blending of two key Old Testament passages is similar. Those passages are:

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10, NASB95)

⁵³ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 20.

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. (Daniel 7:13, NASB95)

Notice that Christ's statement in Matthew combines these two passages. They are used in such a similar way in both places because they are dealing with the same instance in the New Testament era.

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth [land] will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30, NASB95)

Now notice Christ's statement in Revelation doing the same thing.

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth [land] will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. (Revelation 1:7, NASB95)

BOTH HAVE A THEME OF JUDGEMENT

Three, notice the judgement theme in both. The great tribulation is the central element in both the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (Matthew 24:21, NASB95)

Now compare this verse in Matthew with these two in Revelation.

Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. (Revelation 2:22, NASB95)

I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14, NASB95)

BOTH SPEAK OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Last, look at the role the destruction of the Temple plays in both.

And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." (Matthew 24:2, NASB95)

Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months." (Revelation 11:1-2, NASB95)

As B. B. Warfield said of Revelation, "...he who can understand our Lord's great discourse concerning the last things (Matt. 24), cannot fail to understand the Apocalypse, which is founded on that discourse and scarcely advances beyond it."⁵⁴

Matthew 24:3 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 (*parousía*) and of the end of the age?"

the Mount of Olives.... Mark adds the interesting phrase "*opposite the temple*" where all could view the temple which is the theme of this passage.



"And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately," (Mark 13:3, ESV)

"The Mount of Olives ... gave a panoramic view over the temple whose destruction has just been pronounced."⁷

the disciples came to him privately, saying.... The crowds have now moved on. The disciples question breaks down into three parts. First is **when will these things be**. The second is **what will be the sign of your coming**. The third deals with **the end of the age**.

when will these things be.... The **when** question is dealt with in verses 24:4-14 and deals with Jesus comments about the destruction of the temple mentioned in 24:2.

⁵⁴ Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Apocalypse" in Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), vol. II, 652f.

⁷ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 894). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

what will be the sign of your coming.... The **sign** question is dealt with in verses 24:15-35. The sign question at first reading could refer to the immediate subject, the destruction of the temple or to the ultimate coming at the end of the world; Jesus will come in both cases. Which is it here? Verse 34 definitively answers that question by telling us “*Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

So, the question is answered without ambiguity, the signs spoken of here are related to the temple destruction in the first century. But a “coming” is not always a judgment coming or an end of the world coming, only the context tells us for sure.

coming⁸.... This word is sometimes transliterated as **parousía**. Some speak of this word in almost mystical whispers giving it a meaning that cannot be justified in the Bible. In and of itself the word has no theological significance, it just simply means “coming,” it is the context that gives it an eschatological meaning—if there is one.

Matthew 24 is the only place in the Gospels where this word [**παρουσία**] is used: Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39. Verse 24:3 and 27 refer to the judgment coming of Jesus to Israel and the Temple, verses 24:37 and 39 address the coming of Jesus at the end of time. This word is used 20 additional times in the New Testament, 14 of which have eschatological implications. Yet, it is not always clear which of the two coming possibilities are being addressed in these verses.

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:23

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 1 Thessalonians 2:19

so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:15

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 Thessalonians 2:1

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 2 Thessalonians 2:9

⁸ *coming παρουσία* “...to come to be present at a particular place—‘to come, to arrive, to come to be present.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. James 5:7

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. James 5:8

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16

They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 2 Peter 3:4

waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 2 Peter 3:12

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 1 John 2:28

In Matthew, Jesus mentions his coming on two other occasions outside this section, and there he uses another Greek word, *erchomai* (ἐρχομαι), *coming*.

“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes [ἐρχομαι].” (Matthew 10:23, ESV)

“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming [ἐρχομαι] in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:27–28, ESV)

In this section, Matthew 23:35 to Matthew 24:51, there are actually four Greek words used for “come.” However, they do not all have eschatological meanings and they do not all mean the coming of Jesus at the end of time (EOT) or the coming of Jesus in judgment on Jerusalem (J); some have no (N) eschatological meaning. They are:

ἐρχομαι (érchomai) = to come - Matthew 23:35 (J), 39 (J); 24:5 (J), 24:30 (J), 24:39 (EOT), 24:42 (EOT), 24:43 (EOT), 24:44 (EOT), 24:46 (EOT).

προσέρχομαι (prosérchomai) = to approach - Matthew 24:1 (N), 3 (N)

ἤκων (hékō) = to happen or arrive - Matthew 23:36 (J); 24:14 (J), 50 (EOT)

παρουσία (parousía) = arrival - Matthew 24:3 (N), 27 (EOT), 37 (EOT), 39 (EOT)

The first three words are verbs and have no noun variations. One distinctive of **παρουσία (parousía)** is that it is a noun with no verb options. This may be the sole reason for its use and not that it provides information significantly different from the other “coming” words.

Although all words have diverse meanings, in this section these words appear to be interchanged and more the same than different.

So, we should not assume that all “comings” by Jesus are his judgment coming against Jerusalem or the last one in time—the end of the world. They could be either. But, in fact, God has come many times in judgment against Israel and the nations around Israel. And when he comes for the last time in human history, that too will be a judgment coming. So, let’s be careful to ascertain which “coming” Jesus is talking about in these verses.

Let’s take a minute and look at the various “comings” of God in history.

A Coming by God

The coming of God is a common theme in the Bible. However, there is great confusion on the subject. Actually, there are several comings in the Bible. There is of course the final coming of Jesus at the end of time; this is the only one that many Christians know anything about. Yet, there are many *judgment comings* found in Scripture. These are a major part of Bible but are often missed.

So, addressing the coming of Jesus must be considered in the light of various types of comings.

“...there are at least six types of *comings* of God mentioned in the Bible. It is essential that we properly understand and, most importantly, distinguish each of them.

THE COMING IN THEOPHANIES

THE COMING AT BETHLEHEM

THE FINAL COMING AT THE END OF TIME

A SPIRIT COMING

A COMING IN JUDGEMENT AGAINST THE NATIONS

A COMING JUDGEMENT AGAINST ISRAEL

and of the end⁹ of the age.... Or, “the culmination of God’s intended purpose” *on this earth*.

This English word “**end**” in this verse (συντέλεια) is not to be confused with the word “end (τέλος)” in 24:6, 13, 14. The use of different words in these verses suggests that different “ends” are spoken of.

Matthew uses this word (συντέλεια) in 24:3 to refer to the end of the world only, not to the end of the Jewish age. It is used six times in the New Testament. Every use by Matthew, five times, refers to the end of the world.

⁹ *end συντέλεια* “A culmination or completion, the bringing together of an intended purpose. In the NT, used only in the expressions *suntéleia tou aiōnos*, “the completion of the age,” the consummation or accomplishment of its purposes.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

This phrase is used five other times in the New Testament. In Matthew 13 the phrase clearly indicates the end of the world to be followed by the last judgment.

“and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.” (Matthew 13:39–40, ESV)

“So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous” (Matthew 13:49, ESV)

Here in Matthew 24.

“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?”” (Matthew 24:3, ESV)

It seems to have this same meaning in Matthew 28.

“teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20, ESV)

The Book of Hebrews is different; here the author states that Jesus appeared (was born) to put away sin by his sacrifice (the cross) at the end of the ages. All this occurred early in the first century. So, it would appear that there is more than one kind of “end of the age(s)” found in the Bible.

“for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Hebrews 9:26, ESV)

Because the writer of Hebrews uses the word differently, to mean the end of the Jewish age, this would suggest that Matthew was not the writer of Hebrews.

In Conclusion:

Because of the use of this particular word for “end” (συντέλεια), it is possible that the assumption of the disciples was that the end of the world would come when the Temple was destroyed. This is a reasonable way to read this, but not a necessary one. The disciples may simply be adding an additional question as to when the world would come to an end after their questions on the destruction of the Temple. The fact that the Temple has been destroyed once, as they were well aware, does not suggest that the world must come to an end when the Temple is destroyed again. Either way, they are addressing the end of the world by this question.

In addition, note these New Testament comments about the nearness of Christ coming judgment or judgment coming. Although it is possible that some thought Jesus was coming soon for the culmination of the world, that is not a necessary assumption. They are more likely to have been aware that this coming was a judgment coming associated with the end of the Jewish age; and that is what some of these verses are about.

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand,” (Philippians 4:5, ESV)

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:12, ESV)

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” (1 Peter 4:7, ESV)

“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:25, ESV)

“For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;” (Hebrews 10:37, ESV)

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” (1 Peter 4:7, ESV)

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18, ESV)

“You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.” (James 5:8–9, ESV)

“not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.” (2 Thessalonians 2:2, ESV)

However, we should therefore conclude that the use of this word for “end” (συντέλεια) in Matthew 24:3 addresses the end of the world, not the end of the Jewish age with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This subject will soon be addressed in Matthew 24:36-25:46.

When Will These Things Be - Matthew 24:4-14

Outward Threats to the Disciples (24:4-10)

Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered them, **“See that no one leads you astray.**

At this point, Jesus begins to address in detail the first question: **when will these things be?**

This timing question is directly influenced by false Messiahs and Prophets. These first threats come from within Judaism, not from within the Church, although verse 10 begins to tell of the threat within the Church.

astray¹⁰.... “In the first century era the Jews fervently anticipate a conquering Messiah. Jesus warns his disciples not to be caught up in such a **Zionistic frenzy**.”¹¹ **To be involved in political intrigue and religious hysteria is to be led astray.** Jesus came to establish no such movement. But, because **this was the common view of his coming**, it would not be hard for many to accept this false view and be led astray with the promises of false Messiahs and prophets.

Matthew 24:5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.

Verses 5-7 “are signs that Jesus is coming back, and they all will be manifest before the generation Jesus was addressing had died.”¹²

Many today reference these verses as proofs that Jesus is soon coming back in our current generation. However, the context does that allow this. Jesus is speaking to his current generation stating that these things were going to occur in their lifetime.

many¹³.... “Jesus anticipates a number (many) of people putting themselves forward as the ones destined to play the key role in the unfolding of the future.”¹⁴

I am the Christ.... “And there were plenty of such claimants in the unsettled years leading up to the Jewish revolt and the eventual destruction of the temple. See for instance Josephus, *Ant.* 18.85–87 (a Samaritan); 20.97–99 (Theudas), 102 (the sons of Judas of Galilee), 169–172 (“the Egyptian”), 160–161, 167–168, 188 (various unnamed “impostors....

For the ability of such claimants to “deceive many people” cf. Acts p 903, 5:36 for the 400 followers of **Theudas** (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97, speaks of “the majority of the crowd” or “the huge crowd”) and Acts 21:38 for the 4,000 *sicarii* who followed **the Egyptian** (Josephus, *War* 2.261, says they were 30,000). Given the “zealot” ideology which derived from **the revolt of Judas** (see on 22:15–22) and which eventually resulted in the revolt of AD 66, the popularity of such “messianic” figures is not surprising.”¹⁵

The church historian Philip Schaff says, “...the party spirit among the Jews themselves, and their hatred of their heathen oppressors, rose to the most insolent political and religious fanaticism, and was continually inflamed by false prophets and Messiahs, one of whom, for example, according to Josephus, drew after him thirty thousand men. Thus came to pass what our Lord had predicted: “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall lead many astray.””¹⁶

¹⁰ *astray* πλανᾶω “‘to cause to wander off the path,’ ... to cause someone to hold a wrong view and thus be mistaken—‘to mislead, to deceive, deception, to cause to be mistaken.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹¹ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., (1999) *Perilous Times* (p.46), Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press.

¹² Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 497). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹³ *many* πολὺς “...a relatively large quantity of objects or events—‘many, a great deal of, a great number of.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁴ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 961). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 902–903.

¹⁶ Schaff, P., & Schaff, D. S. (1910). *History of the Christian church* (Vol. 1, p. 394). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Another prophet mentioned by Josephus was from Samaria.

“(85) But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without tumults. The man who excited them to it, was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived everything so, that the multitude might be pleased; so he bade them get together upon Mount Gerizzim, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them that, when they were come thither, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there.

(86) So they came thither armed, and thought the discourse of the man probable....

(87) But Pilate prevented their going up, by seizing upon the roads with a great band of horsemen and footmen, who fell upon those that were gotten together in the village; and when they came to an action, some of them they slew, and others of them they put to flight, and took a great many alive, the principal of whom, and also the most potent of those that fled away, Pilate ordered to be slain.”¹⁷

An early church father, Justin Martyr, says: “...after Christ’s ascension into heaven the devils put forward certain men who said that they themselves were gods....”¹⁸

they will lead many astray.... And again, Josephus says:

“And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, (168) and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishments of their folly....”¹⁹

John, one of the disciples that heard this message by Jesus and who wrote the Book of Revelation says during his life time:

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18, ESV)

This statement helps place the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in the first century—the century in which John wrote these words and calls it “the last hour.”

Matthew 24:6 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.

you will hear.... It is important to keep in mind our context: it is not New York City or Los Angeles in the twenty-first century. Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples in the first century on the Mount of Olives while looking at Jerusalem. **It is what they will hear, that is our context, not what you and I may hear today.**

Why is verse six important to the first century Christian? “...if one lived in or around Jerusalem and the wars one heard of were going to lead to the prophesied event, then

¹⁷ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 482.

¹⁸ Justin Martyr. (1885). *The First Apology of Justin*. In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Vol. 1, p. 171). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

¹⁹ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

alarm would be appropriate, the kind of alarm that might lead to the rapid evacuation which will be proposed in vv. 16–18.”²⁰ There we read, “*then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*” (Matthew 24:16, ESV). This is exactly what happened when the Roman armies approached Jerusalem; the Church abandoned the city.

wars and rumors of wars.... Hardly a month goes by in which a Futurist²¹ does not point to the “*wars and rumors of wars*” found in our world as proof that “the Lord is coming soon.” The problem with this is the fact that **wars have been common since the fall of man.** The very fact of its commonality would seem to disqualify this “sign” from having any useful value as an indicator of anything. In this scenario, giving such a sign would not even be a rational act. It simply would never indicate anything unique that was about to happen.

In fact, the only way this could have a use as an indicator or sign of Jesus coming and of the end of the age would be a fulfillment in a period in which wars were rather uncommon. **Was there ever such a time?** There was; it was called the Pax Romana or Peace of Rome.

“Pax Romana (Latin for “Roman peace”) was the long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force experienced by the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Since it was established by Augustus, it is sometimes called Pax Augusta. Its span was approximately 206 years (27 BC to 180 AD).”²² In other words, this period encompassed the life of Jesus and the early Church.

Although there were some wars during this period, they were less than periods before and after it. It was during this period that Jesus was born and lived. One area that saw a major violation to this peace was Israel in the period A.D. 60 to A.D. 70. **But because peace was otherwise the common experience of most of the empire at this time, it provides a unique period in history in which wars and rumors of wars could truly be a sign of something.**

end²³.... We see this word in verses 6, 13, and 14. The context is 24:4-14. This is the section that deals with the question of “when.” The thrust of 24:2 is the destruction of

²⁰ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 962). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

²¹ “The Futurists see in this book a prophecy about times that have not yet come and events that have not yet occurred. Although the Book of Revelation was written to seven churches nearly 2000 years ago, they see in this book no significant message to those churches, because to the Futurists, this book is about a future rapture, tribulation and millennium. Dispensational Premillennialists dominate the Futurist’s camp.

The denominations that commonly subscribe to this position include Baptists, the Mormons, the Armstrong Church of God, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists. In addition, many “Bible Churches” or “Community Churches” and most graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary would be advocates of Dispensational Premillennialism. The Dispensational Premillennialists view is that of the *Left Behind* book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, two prominent Dispensational authors. Some others who share this view are John Nelson Darby, Arno C. Gaebelin, Donald Grey Barnhouse, H. A. Ironside, Hal Lindsey, Henry M. Morris, Charles C. Ryrie, J. A. Seiss, Charles L. Feinberg, M. R. DeHaan, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Gleason L. Archer, Lehman Strauss, Merrill C. Tenney, Dwight Pentecost and John Walvoord.”

Bass, R. E. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (pp. 11-12). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_romana

²³ *end τέλος* “...a point of time marking the end of a duration—‘end.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. This would be the “end” that Jesus is referencing in verse 6. “The question which Jesus is here answering was about when the temple would be destroyed, and that is the “end” most naturally understood here.”²⁴ **So, the disciples must not let the warnings in verses 5 and 6 above cause them to think that the end is imminent; it is soon but not immediately so. From verse 8 we learn that these signs are but the beginning of the period that will lead to the end.**

The question was about when the temple would be destroyed. It is coming soon....”
How soon?

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

Matthew 24:7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom....

Notwithstanding the Pax Romana, there was one period of general interruption, the period between A.D. 60 and A.D. 70. Although Rome survived these wars and reasserted its control over its empire, **because it was a generally peaceful period, it was truly a sign of the times.**

“In the decade of the 60’s A.D., Rome’s history was a time when the Empire was experiencing both civil wars and foreign wars. It was not a time when it had firm control of its allies. It was a time when troops were at a premium because of their commitment to so many other engagements. That decade opened with the great revolt in Britain under Boudicca in A.D. 60 which almost lost the Province to Rome, and saw the total destruction of the cities of Colchester, St. Albans and London with the massacre of all Romans and Roman allies found in them. The whole decade was one of strife, leading to the crescendo of the great fire of Rome (A.D. 64), to the Jewish rebellion, the revolt of the Germanic legions, the death of Nero, and the “year of the four Emperors.”²⁵

famines.... Like war, until the industrial revolution, famines were common across the globe. For instance, “Between 108 BC and 1911 AD there were no fewer than 1,828 major famines in China, or one nearly every year in one or another province....” **So the value of a famine as a “sign” of something being so common, would seem to be limited.** But looking at the history of famines, we see that they were missing in the Mediterranean during the period of the Roman Empire, the first one recorded was about A.D. 400 and was associated with Alaric I and the fall of the Roman Empire.²⁶ **That being the case, if there were famines in this area during this period, it would indeed be a sign.**

We begin to see this period of prosperity broken when a famine was prophesied by Agabus that took place in the days of Claudius. He was emperor from A.D. 41 to 54, right before the Jewish war with Rome.

²⁴ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 903). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

²⁵ Bass, R. E. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (pp. 359–360). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_famines

“And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).” (Acts 11:28, ESV)

Later Josephus commented on this famine saying, “a little before the beginning of this war, when Claudius was emperor of the Romans, and Ismael was our high priest, and when so great a famine was come upon us, that one-tenth deal [of wheat] was sold for four drachmae....”²⁷

The phrase “this war” refers to the war by the Romans against Israel culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

There was a gentile named Queen Helena from an area east of the Tigris who became a Jew who did much to relieve a famine in Israel. “Now her coming was of very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem; for whereas a famine did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food withal, queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn, and others of them to Cyprus, to bring a cargo of dried figs....”²⁸

These famines crescendo during the siege of Jerusalem mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

“When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!”” (Revelation 6:5–6, ESV)

“The symbol is not difficult of interpretation. It signifies the deepening horrors of the war. Famine follows on the heels of war and slaughter.” The **scales (6:5)** are to demonstrate the shortage of food. The quart was the daily ration of wheat for one person. A **denarius (6:6)** was a day’s wage. “...the denarius was the standard daily wage for a rural worker (see Matt 20.2). This was a very high price for a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley, perhaps as much as ten times the normal price, and indicates a severe shortage as a result of war.” To feed a family one would need to buy **barley (6:6)** instead, a less desirable and less nutritious grain.²⁹

Josephus gives us some detail as to how bad the famine became.

“The madness of the seditious did also increase together with their famine, and both those miseries were every day inflamed more and more; (425) for there was no corn which anywhere appeared publicly, but the robbers came running into, and searched men’s private houses; and then, if they found any, they tormented them, because they had denied they had any; and if they found none, they tormented them worse, because they supposed they had more carefully concealed it. (426) The indication they made use of whether they had any or not, was taken from the bodies of these miserable wretches; which, if they were in good case, they supposed they were in no

²⁷ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 101.

²⁸ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

²⁹ Bass, R. E. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (p. 179). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

want at all of food; but if they were wasted away, they walked off without searching any farther; nor did they think it proper to kill such as these, because they saw they would very soon die of themselves for want of food. (427) **Many there were indeed who sold what they had for one measure; it was of wheat, if they were of the richer sort, but of barley, if they were poorer.** When these had so done, they shut themselves up in the inmost rooms of their houses, and ate the corn they had gotten; some did it without grinding it, by reason of the extremity of the want they were in, and others baked bread of it, according as necessity and fear dictated to them; (428) a table was nowhere laid for a distinct meal, but they snatched the bread out of the fire, half-baked, and ate it very hastily.”³⁰

Because famine was not common during this period of Roman history, it was therefore an effective “sign” of the coming “end” that Jesus spoke of.

earthquakes.... A problem we face when studying earthquakes is the need of some kind of ancient frequency record to reference; we don’t have one. Of course, earthquakes were common in the Mediterranean world. Whether they were less common prior to Jesus life and ministry and more common after his teaching this, we do not know. Our first record of an earthquake comes soon after this prophecy at the crucifixion of Jesus.

“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matthew 27:51, ESV)

“Such historical records as we have for the first century mention earthquakes in Asia Minor in AD 61 and in Italy in AD 62, in Jerusalem in AD 67, and another serious earthquake at an unspecified earlier date in Palestine.”³¹

During the siege of Jerusalem Josephus says, “(286) for there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. (287) These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming.”³²

Because earthquakes are here associated with famine and war, it does seem reasonable to suggest that for this period they have become somewhat uncommon. But now, as here predicted by Jesus, they become more common again.

Matthew 24:8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

The phrase ***birth pains*** is common in the Old Testament for a time of disaster (Isaiah 13:8, 26:17; Jeremiah 4:31, 6:24; Micah 4:9-10).

It seems that Paul was echoing Jesus’ words in I Thessalonians.

³⁰ Bass, R. E. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (pp. 179–180). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

³¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 903–904). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³² Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

“While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:3, ESV)

““Labor pains” in itself implies “not yet” (the pains precede the birth, sometimes for a long period), and with the addition of “the beginning” the phrase clearly echoes the message of v. 6, that “it is not yet the end.””³³

“Beginning in the OT and coming to its fullest expression in the apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period, the experience of certain signs, preeminently of human suffering, was understood as pointing to the imminence of the turning of the ages. These sufferings were as closely linked with the dawning of a new reality as were the labor pains of a woman giving birth. The messianic woes would lead directly to the messianic age.”³⁴

Matthew 24:9 “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.

This is a private conversation (Matthew 24:3); this warning of tribulation and death is directed to the Twelve. During their lifetime their ministry will reach “all nations” and in each case, they will be hated and murdered. The only known exception to this was John.

Jesus here fleshes out his prior public comments from just a few minutes earlier.

“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,” (Matthew 23:34, ESV)

they will deliver you up.... “... it is probably intended to mean fellow members of the Jewish community.”³⁵

“Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts....” (Matthew 10:17, ESV)

to tribulation³⁶....

“... and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” (Matthew 10:17–18, ESV)

put you to death....

“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,” (Matthew 10:21, ESV)

³³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 904). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³⁴ Hagner, D. A. (1998). *Matthew 14–28* (Vol. 33B, pp. 691–692). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

³⁵ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 965). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³⁶ *to tribulation* θλίψις “...trouble involving direct suffering—“trouble and suffering, suffering, persecution.”” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

you will be hated by all....

“and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22, ESV)

all nations.... Although the ministry of the disciples was in some cases to far lands (Thomas to India), the main thrust to “all nations” would be to those enveloped in the Roman Empire beginning from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, ESV)

“This will not mean hatred by Gentiles as opposed to Jews, but an expanded horizon in which Gentile hatred is added to Jewish.”³⁷

name’s sake.... “The basis of their unpopularity is still the “name” of Jesus (10:18, 22; 24:9), a concept which is now the more readily understood since Jesus has declared himself (and therefore also his followers) against the temple and thus has set up what will become one of the main causes of popular resentment against Christians.”³⁸

“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” (John 15:20–21, ESV)

Internal Threats Within the Disciples Community (24:10-12)

Matthew 24:10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

many will fall away.... With this phrase, Jesus moves beyond the Twelve to the mass of first century believers, but especially those living in Israel. Later, the Apostle John would expand on this comment.

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19, ESV)

The writer of Hebrews is also concerned about this topic giving several warnings in his book about the consequence of falling away.

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” (Hebrews 2:1, ESV)

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying

³⁷ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 965). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³⁸ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 905). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4–6, ESV)

“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:26–27, ESV)

betray one another.... By the mid AD 60’s, “Both Pliny and Tacitus mention Christians convicted on the testimony of others, and the phrase “hand over to be killed” here suggests a similar use of informers.”³⁹ “First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large number of others were condemned.”⁴⁰ **This persecution lasted from around November, A.D. 64 to Nero’s death June 8, A.D. 68. This was right prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 67-70 and therefore particularly significant to our passage here.**

Matthew 24:11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

“Here, as in 7:15, the focus appears to be on impostors within the disciple community rather than the messianic claimants predicted in vv. 4–5.”⁴¹

false prophets.... These particular false prophets would be those active in the Christian church.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:15, ESV)

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

lawlessness.... In the context of first century Israel and the Church, lawlessness would reference the law of God, this is the particularly the area of failure addressed here, not primarily what we might call “law and order” in civil society. There is a relationship between living God’s law and loving one’s neighbor. A failure of one results in the failure of the other. Notice the order, lawlessness increases, love decreases. It is not the other way around, love decreases therefore lawlessness increases. It is the failure to obey the law of God that results in a loss of love. Obedience to the law of God results in love of neighbor.

increased.... To increase lawlessness is to increase a disinterest in and an obedience to the word of God. ““Wickedness” (ἀνομία) [lawlessness] and “love” (ἀγάπη) cannot coexist; where one proliferates, the other must correspondingly disappear.”⁴²

many.... The word “many” is a key to the verse. Note that “many” is found 6 times in this passage. It creates a context and from that a pattern.

³⁹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 394). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.

⁴¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 906.

⁴² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 876.

“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:5, ESV)

“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.” (Matthew 24:10, ESV)

“And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:11, ESV)

“And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12, ESV)

In general, the material breaks down this way: 24:4-9 are tribulations from without; 24:10-14 is treason from within. All this material is part of Jesus’ answer to the when question of 24:3. These behaviors help define the timing of the coming return of Christ in judgment—(1) Jewish tribulation and apostacy, and (2) Christian lawlessness and apostacy. The key thought is apostacy.

Verse 24:5 addresses the Jewish world in the first century; many false Christ lead many astray by defying Rome and rejecting the true Christ with a concomitant hate for one another.

Verse 24:11 addresses the Church; false prophets lead many astray. The Church, conforming to their lawless message, soon grows cold in their love for one another.

When lawlessness is preached in any form, coldness of heart follows. Whether it is a coldness of self-righteousness or a tolerance of a sin that God is not tolerant of, true love dies.

“And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:23, ESV)

During these forty years from Calvary to the righteous judgment of God in the destruction of the Temple, Judaism and the Church suffered increasing evil.

grow cold.... “...the verse has in view the failure rather than the weakening of love. It is the loss of love that makes the betrayal of v. 10 possible.”⁴³

“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,” (Matthew 10:21, ESV)

Matthew 24:13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

endures.... Endures what? Endures the external terrors of a fallen world in verses 4-9 and the internal threats of lawlessness in the Church in verses 10-12. “In response to both ... the only remedy is deliberate, sustained faithfulness to the values and demands of God’s kingdom.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 966). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁴⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 907.

“and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:22, ESV)

the end.... The material between 24:4 and 24:14 encompass one subject, the end of the Jewish age demonstrated in the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem and its Temple—not the end of the world.

“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.” (Matthew 24:6, ESV)

In 24:6, it was “not yet.” But in 24:14 the end draws nearer, “*the end will come.*”

will be saved.... What type of salvation is Jesus here addressing. The Greek word used for **saved** can reference any kind of deliverance—one who saves you from drowning for instance. But here it appears to mean saved from hell. The implications are important; some who have identified themselves with the disciples and with the Church will fail and not be saved. But, they will not lose their salvation; their behavior will prove they were never saved.

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” (1 John 2:19, ESV)

The material in verses 24:10-12 illustrates the types of failure these “believers” experienced.

“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.” (Matthew 24:10–12, ESV)

Revelation 21:8 says something similar:

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8, ESV)

Why is “*cowardly*” in this list of sins? It does not appear that this behavior compares with the others. Doesn’t cowardly mean that they were fearful and aren’t we all fearful? Yes. But this is a fear that God will not countenance. It is a fear that is a worse sin than the others in the list. It is the fear of the apostate who because of his cowardly fear denies Christ. Matthew 24:13 likewise addresses the cowardly behavior of the betrayers and haters of the Church that they one embraced. They do not endure, they are lost, not saved.

But do not confuse this behavior thinking that a Christian must live a perfect or near-perfect lifestyle in order to be saved. The thought would be: if you reach and maintain such perfection, you will be saved but, if you don’t, you will be lost. That is *not* what this passage is teaching. Consider Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy:

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if

| *we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*” (2 Timothy 2:11–13, ESV)

Notice, “*if we endure, we will also reign.*” Doesn’t this mean we must lead that straight and narrow life that does not fail? After all it goes on to say, “*if we deny him, he also will deny us.*” Isn’t this what Jesus and John are saying? It is, but only in this sense: Jesus, John and Paul are addressing apostasy. If you apostatize, you are lost, and Jesus will deny the apostate. But that is not the same thing as failing to live a sin-free life. Notice what Paul goes on to say, “*if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*” Sin in the Christian life is much to be regretted, but it does not result in the loss of salvation “*he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*” The issue in Matthew 24:13 is apostasy not the struggle of Godly living.

Let’s take a closer look at the Christian church in Israel during these years. If your family won’t talk to you because of your commitment to Christ, and friends will have nothing to do with you, and the local merchants won’t buy or sell anything to or from you—enduring to the end might prove to some more than they thought they were buying into. “Come back to your family, friends and your ancient Jewish faith, all will be forgiven, all will be right again.”

Those that endure in a true faith to the end are saved; those that apostatize and go back are lost. But, believers struggle with sin in their walk and, God “*remains faithful*” in their struggle for holiness. The believer is never lost.

Matthew 24:14 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.

gospel of the kingdom.... This is now the third time Matthew uses this phrase.

“*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*” (Matthew 4:23, ESV)

“*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.*” (Matthew 9:35, ESV)

The same gospel Jesus taught is to be proclaimed by his disciples throughout the, or their, whole world.

world⁴⁵.... Let’s consider some definitions for this word:

“① the earth as inhabited area, exclusive of the heavens above and nether regions, the inhabited earth, the world

② the world as administrative unit, the Roman Empire....”⁴⁶

“1. ... earth, the world ...

⁴⁵ *world* οἰκουμένη “This word, having the sense of a noun, denotes the “inhabited world” and then comes into use for the Roman empire. The NT never contests the Roman claim that equates the οἰκουμένη with the empire.” Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

⁴⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2. empire, the entire Roman world ...
3. people, humankind...."⁴⁷

Isn't Jesus here talking about our modern missionary movement bringing the Gospel to every tribe and nation on the earth? No, he is not. He is talking about the Roman Empire.

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered." (Luke 2:1, ESV)

So, the question is, which "whole world" is it? The whole globe or the world known to the disciples—the whole Roman Empire? If you were standing there that day, would you be thinking about the need for new missions to South America or Japan? You would not!

all nations.... The context is the key to answering the question. Simply put, who is Jesus talking to and what event is he referencing? The answer demands that we understand that Jesus is referring to the world of the disciples, the Roman Empire.

Paul addresses the Church about the proclamation of the word and says:

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world." (Romans 1:8, ESV)

"but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—" (Romans 16:26, ESV)

"which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth," (Colossians 1:6, ESV)

"if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister." (Colossians 1:23, ESV)

"For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything." (1 Thessalonians 1:8, ESV)

Simply put, "*this gospel of the kingdom*" had been "*proclaimed throughout the whole world...to all nations*" by AD 70.

How far did it go? "We tend to associate the arrival of Christianity in Britain with the mission of Augustine in 597 AD. But in fact Christianity arrived long before then, and in the 1st Century AD, there was an organised attempt to convert the British."⁴⁸

"...the Apostle Paul, "after preaching in the east and west... taught righteousness to the whole world, and came to the extreme limit of the west" (Epistle to the Corinthians,

⁴⁷ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/uk_1.shtml

chap. 5, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 9, p. 231). Some think Clement's phrase "the extreme limit of the west" refers to Rome, while others believe it refers to Spain or Britain. Yet any map of the Roman Empire in the first century shows that the Britannic Isles—not Rome or Spain—represent the extremity of the west."⁴⁹

then the end⁵⁰ will come.... The English word "**end**" in 24:3 (συντέλεια) is not to be confused with the word "end (τέλος)" in 24:6, 13, 14—our passage here. The use of different words in these verses suggests that different "ends" are spoken of. The word used in 24:14 addresses the end of the Jewish age, not the end of the world.

Matthew uses this word (συντέλεια) in 24:3 to refer to the end of the world only, not to the end of the Jewish age. It is used six times in the New Testament. Every use by Matthew, five times, refers to the end of the world.

Here we are told that after the indicators found in verses 7 through 14, the end will come. In context, the end that will come is the destruction of the Temple and the nation, not the end of the world. One could hardly describe the confusion this phrase has caused by those who miss this point—Dispensational Premillennialists.

What Will Be the Sign of Your Coming – Matthew 24:15-35

Let us remember our context; it begins with Matthew 24:36 and goes through 24:35.

"Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation." (Matthew 23:36, ESV)

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

Our current section, 24:15-35, fits within this larger context. So, what we are about to study sees its fulfillment in "*this generation*," the one he was then addressing.

The material in 24:4 through 24:35 breaks down into two sections; the when and the what of his 1st century coming. Matthew 24:4-14 dealt with the question, "*Tell us, when will these things be?*" Here, 24:15-24:35, deals with the question, "*what will be the sign of your coming...?*" (Matthew 24:3, ESV).

The next question after the *when* and *what* material deals with "*and of the end of the age.*" It is a separate answer by Jesus and starts at 24:36. It is set apart by a different inclusio "*day and hour.*"

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Matthew 24:36, ESV)

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:13, ESV)

⁴⁹ <https://www.tomorrowworld.org/magazines/2008/march-april/early-christianity-and-europes-western-isles>

⁵⁰ *end τέλος* a point of time marking the end of a duration—'end.' Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 637.

Therefore, our current material, 24:15-35 is not a part of the end of the world question but continues to address the previous question, the destruction of the Temple. The end of the world material is found in 24:36 to 25:13 and following.

Matthew 24:15 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

“Developments towards the end take a fresh step with the appearance of the desolating sacrilege in the temple. This points towards a time of immense suffering and calls for urgent flight to the hills.”⁵¹ When the reader sees these next indicators, he is to act quickly for now the end is upon him. In verse 6 it was “*the end is not yet.*” In verse 14 it was “*the end will come.*” Now, in our section it is “*flee to the mountains.*” At this point the end is so near that one cannot even stop to enter his house or grab his cloak (24:17-18). The progression is marked by these phrases.

see⁵².... There is now a visible sign, there is something to see. What will they see?

abomination....

(I) Generally that which is detestable to God

(II) That which was unclean in the Jewish tradition and especially of impure idol worship; hence, idolatry, licentiousness, abominable impurity”⁵³

desolation.... “...to desolate. The act or the process of making desolate (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14) in the phrase “the abomination of desolation” meaning the abomination that makes desolate, stressing the effect of the process (Luke 21:20), and referring to the desolation or depopulation of Jerusalem and the temple as a result of their abomination or desecration.”⁵⁴ R.T. France calls it the “devastating pollution.”

abomination of desolation.... “... (a fixed phrase derived from Hebrew, literally ‘the detestable thing of desolation’) an abomination (either an object or an event) which **defiles a holy place** and thus **causes it to be abandoned and left desolate**—‘an abomination which desolates, a horrible thing which defiles.’”⁵⁵

Jesus is here referencing these passages by Daniel:

“Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” (Daniel 8:13, ESV)

“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

⁵¹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 968). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁵² see εἶδον “...to see, sight, seeing.” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁵³ *abomination* βδέλυγμα “...to emit a foul odor, to turn away through loathing or disgust, abhor. Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁵⁴ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁵⁵ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:27, ESV)

“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.” (Daniel 11:31, ESV)

“And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.” (Daniel 12:11, ESV)

These prophecies found their fulfillment in the inter-testament years, after the events of Malachi and before the events of Matthew—between about 430 BC and the birth of Jesus.

“The original reference is clearly to the desecration of the temple by the soldiers of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), the ceasing of the daily burnt offering, and the erection of an idol altar upon the Great Altar of Sacrifice in 168 B.C. Thus it is plain that Christ, in quoting the words of Daniel, intended to foretell a desecration of the temple (or perhaps of the Holy City) resembling that of Antiochus and resulting in the destruction of the national life and religion. Josephus draws a similar parallel between the Jewish misfortunes under Antiochus and the desolation caused by the Romans. There was also the desecration of the temple by the Zealots just before the attack on Jerusalem by Titus. Having seized the temple, they (the Zealots) made it a stronghold and “entered the sanctuary with polluted feet.” In opposition to Ananus, they set up as high priest Phannias, described by Josephus as “a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but ignorant of what the high priesthood was.” The temple areas were defiled with blood, and Ananus was murdered. His murder, says Josephus, was the beginning of the capture of the city: Between the first appearance of the Roman armies before Jerusalem (A.D. 66) [by Vespasian] and the final appearance by Titus (just before Passover A.D. 70), there was ample time for flight “into the mountains” (Matt. 24:15–20).”⁵⁶

“Probably during the winter of AD 67/8 the Zealots took over the temple as their headquarters and Josephus speaks with horror of the way they “invaded the sanctuary with polluted feet” and mocked the temple ritual, while the sanctuary was defiled with blood as factional fighting broke out (Josephus, *War* 4.150–157, 196–207).”⁵⁷

“The reader is presumably to identify something which is in recognizable continuity with the devastating pollution set up by Antiochus, but just what form it will take is left to the imagination. The wording suggests some sort of offensive pollution “set up in the holy place,” which should mean the temple, and the context requires that it be of such a nature and at such a time as to allow those who see it to escape before it is too late.”⁵⁸

There are many suggestions as to what constituted the abomination of desolation, but this incident by the Zealots seems closer both to the original references in Daniel and of the history of the Temple under Antiochus IV (Epiphanes). The timing and content of

⁵⁶ *desolation* ἐρήμωσις, Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

⁵⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 913.

⁵⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 912.

this story is extremely important for it gave time for the Christian community to act by abandoning the city.

standing in the holy place.... What makes this an abomination of desolation is that it defiles the holy place, the Temple.

let the reader understand.... "...the aside, "*let the reader understand,*" is best understood as a call to study the book of Daniel."⁵⁹

Matthew 24:16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

"Thus the text reminds the readers of the "abomination of desolation" in the temple before the year 70 that had been predicted by Daniel and of the flight at that time of the Judean churches from the Judean villages into the surrounding mountains."⁶⁰

"The instructions Jesus gives his disciples about what to do in view of v. 15 are so specific that they must be related to the Jewish War."⁶¹ About this passage Eusebius says, "But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed⁶² to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgement of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men."⁶³

For ***the abomination of desolation (24:15)*** to be useful as a sign that allows people to ***flee to the mountains***, ***it would need to be visible before the doors to Jerusalem were closed permanently.*** So, at some point between when Vespasian began his war on Israel and the point at which Jerusalem was destroyed by his son Titus, the Church would have left the city. In other words, if the Roman soldiers were in the temple desecrating and burning it, then we have passed the point when anyone can flee to safety. "...by the time the Romans had actually desecrated the temple in A.D. 70, it was too late for anyone in the city to flee."⁶⁴

Luke appears to clear it up saying:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near." (Luke 21:20, ESV)

The armies surrounding the city demonstrate that the abomination of desolation is near, but not fully seen. That was soon followed by "Zealot excesses that polluted the temple before A.D. 70 (including murder and the installation of a false high priest; cf. Jos. War

⁵⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 195.

⁶⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 196.

⁶¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 501). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁶² "...to grant or give, as by favor, graciousness, or condescension...."

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vouchsafe>

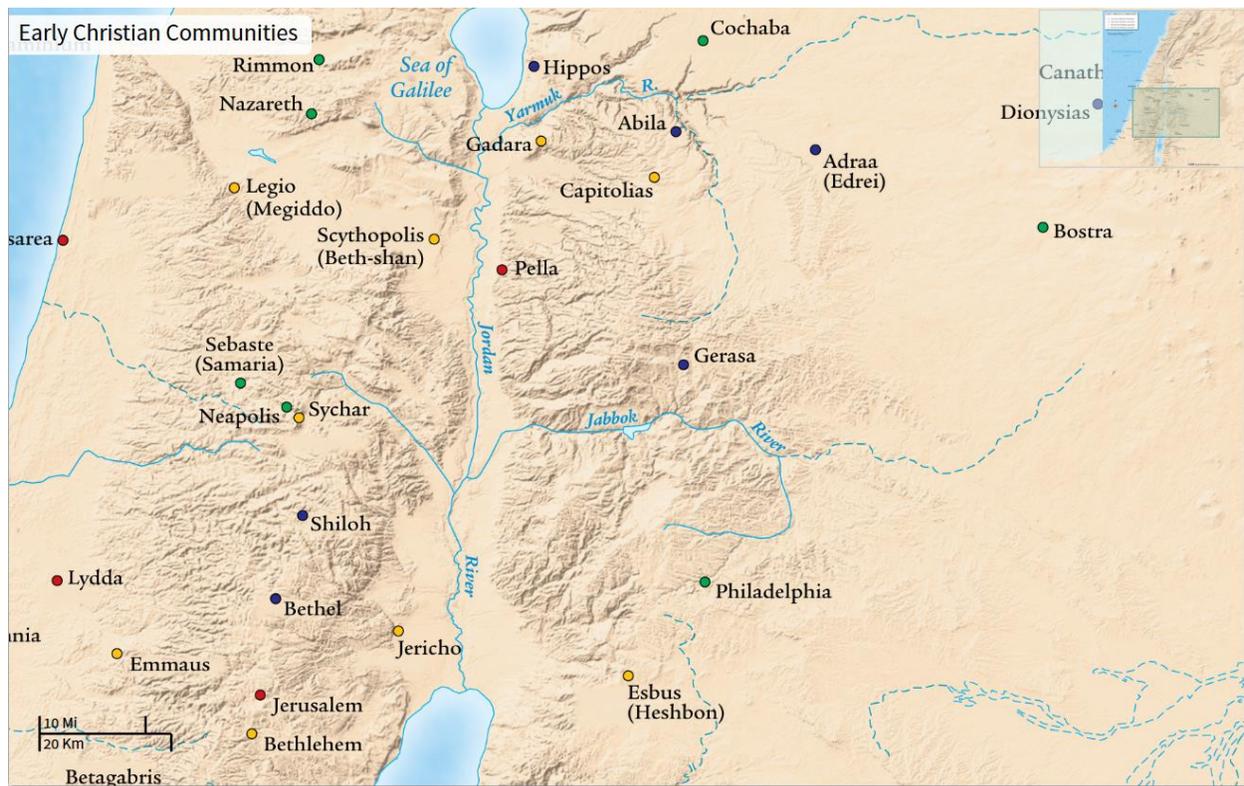
⁶³ *Early Church Fathers - Nicene/Post Nicene Part 2*, Volume One (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 1999), Vol. 1, Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 500). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

IV, 147–57 [iii.6–8], 162–92 [iii.10], 334–44 [v.4]), when there was still time to flee.... In any case, there is reasonably good tradition that Christians abandoned the city, perhaps in A.D. 68, about halfway through the siege.”⁶⁵

flee to the mountains.... “...these mountains were the traditional first refuge of Israel’s population no matter where their final destination was.”⁶⁶ This is not good advice to those living in many places of the world, but this is not addressed to any but Jews in the first century. “...here one is dealing with local events in the land of Israel.”⁶⁷

They are not to flee to the wilderness (24:26) and they are certainly to stay off the roads which are watched by the Romans. Instead, they are to take mountain paths from the area and take themselves out of the preview of the Romans, to Pella in the Decapolis, the ten cities of the Gentiles.



“Pella was rebuilt again during the first centuries BC and AD, and in the late AD 60s it reportedly served as a refuge for Christians fleeing the Jewish-Roman turmoil in Jerusalem.”⁶⁸

Matthew 24:17 *Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house,*

“Let him which is on the house [top not come down] to take any thing out of his house.” (Matthew 24:17, KJV 1900)

⁶⁵ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 501). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁶⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 196.

⁶⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 196.

⁶⁸ Benjamin M. Loset, “Pella,” ed. John D. Barry, David Bomar, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

“The imagery ... is of a person on the flat roof that served as an important extension of the living area of a typical Mediterranean dwelling (cf. Acts 10:9). The way down was not through the house but by an external staircase. To leave as quickly as possible would involve leaving everything in the house behind.”⁶⁹

Matthew 24:18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

the one who is in the field.... These phrases in 24:17-18 are stock images of the need of speed in the face of a coming catastrophe, they are presented as a warning of an any moment disaster, so near that no time is possible to make preparation to leave. **They are not prophecies that men will be on housetops or in fields when the city is surrounded.** I'm sure people did go into their houses and grab their children and probably much more. They may have grabbed a “bug-out bag” all packed and ready to go for when this moment arrived. This was not a literal order to not go in the house and get your family, but an image of the need of a hast that is almost indescribable without the use of hyperbolic language of this sort. These statements would correspond to something like, “you have exactly 2 seconds to get in that car” when you are trying to motivate someone to take immediate action.

“Part of the sense is given by the recognition that the fate of the temple and city is fixed in the purpose of God and will involve all the horror that fits with this being an act of judgment that expresses his extreme displeasure. Leaving the city to its fate involves radical disconnection from it, which finds concrete expression in urgent flight.”⁷⁰

Matthew 24:19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!

“Coming in the midst of other flight material, the verse deals with pregnant and nursing mothers caught up in the rigors of flight, not with those trapped in the doomed city. The need to abandon everything and move with extreme haste poses huge hardship for pregnant and nursing mothers.”⁷¹ This may be a combination of a literal statement and a stock image. Again, the message is one of coming disaster and the need for haste.

Matthew 24:20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

Pray.... Since these events are prophesied and therefore pre-determined—what good would prayer do? At this point, could prayer change anything? I think it is important to recognize that God’s actions in the present are predetermined by God’s eternal awareness of our current prayers. We take knowledge that we are praying today, God takes knowledge of this fact from all eternity past and answers accordingly. Yes, prayer does change things.

in winter.... “Hiding in the mountains is considerably more difficult in winter than in summer. The outer garment left behind in v. 18 would be sorely missed in winter. Food is much less readily available in winter.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 972). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁷⁰ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 973). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁷¹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 973). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁷² Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 974). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

on a Sabbath.... Some "...difficulties with sabbath flight have to do with the degree to which the normal structures of public provision temporarily shut down on the sabbath; for example, city gates were shut, shops were closed, and even more informal buying and selling were temporarily stopped."⁷³

"As for fleeing on the Sabbath, travel would become more difficult because few would help, and many would try to prevent traveling farther than a Sabbath day's journey. Jesus clearly expects these events to take place while the strict Sabbath law is in effect."⁷⁴

In addition, one would miss the opportunity to rest and to worship on the Sabbath both of which were important and dear to the hearts of believers.

Matthew 24:21 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.

"Matthew's attention now moves to the oppression heralded by the appearance of the 'desolating sacrilege'. He intends to speak further about that from which the Christians have been urged to flee."⁷⁵

great tribulation.... Matthew 24:9 mentioned "*tribulation.*"

"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." (Matthew 24:9, ESV)

But now in 24:21 Matthew calls this new situation a "**great tribulation.**"

Daniel calls it "a time of trouble."

"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book." (Daniel 12:1, ESV)

However, we must be careful, not every tribulation must be identified as this one. There have been many tribulations in the last two-thousand years and many others are right around the corner. John in the Book of Revelation speaks of the great tribulation and its martyrs as well.

"... And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14, ESV)

This great tribulation in Revelation 7 refers to the many martyrdoms of the first century by both Jews and Romans and not necessarily of the Jews in Jerusalem at this time.

⁷³ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 974). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁷⁴ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 501). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁷⁵ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 975). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now.... Josephus speaks of the tribulation during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70: “Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were....”⁷⁶

From all this, Jesus instructs his audience to **flee** (24:6); and they did.

Review

There were two periods when Christians would have had opportunity to flee Jerusalem. One right at the beginning of the siege around A.D. 67.

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.” (Luke 21:20, ESV)

However, Luke identifies this point as one near not fully arrived. So, this is likely not the time to flee. Many, not knowing any better, were fleeing to Jerusalem for protection, a common reaction in time of war. A *second* opportunity occurred around A.D.69. By this point, the conditions in the city were so severe that many did want out. After Vespasian returned to Rome to become Emperor, he left Jerusalem loosely guarded. After achieving his goal of achieving royal status, he sent his son Titus to finish what he had begun. It took Titus five months to complete the destruction. But between these points, the Church fled the city.

“...for Titus let a great number of them go away into the country, whither they pleased; and the main reasons why they were so ready to desert were these: that now they should be freed from those miseries which they had endured in that city, and yet should not be in slavery to the Romans....”⁷⁷

And of this event Eusebius, the Church Historian of the first century, said, “But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed⁷⁸ to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.”⁷⁹

and never will be.... “There have been greater numbers of deaths—six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin—but never so high a percentage of a great city’s population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). Wars of the Jews 1.12, *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁷⁷ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁷⁸ vouchsafed “...to grant or give, as by favor, graciousness, or condescension....”

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/vouchsafe>

⁷⁹ Eusebius of Caesaria. (1890). The Church History of Eusebius. In P. Schaff & H. Wace (Eds.), A. C. McGiffert (Trans.), *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Vol. 1, p. 138). New York: Christian Literature Company.

⁸⁰ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 501). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

“In passing, we should note that “*nor ever will be again*” confirms that this passage is about a historical event, not about the end of the world!”⁸¹ If there is a time called “will be again” then there is yet more time and history in the years to come. **This incident is not the end of the entire world—but it is the end of the Jewish world.**

Matthew 24:22 *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.*

cut short.... “The horror was in fact “cut short” by the Roman capture of the city after five months, bringing physical relief to those who had survived the famine in the city.”⁸²

no human being.... The phrase addresses those in Jerusalem, not everyone on the face of the earth.

Beware of False Christs, Even Then (24:23–28)

Matthew 24:23 *Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.*

Then.... “The fresh τότε (‘then’) locates the action here after the appearance of the desolating sacrilege and the occurrence of the flight.”⁸³ Therefore, instead of being a reiteration of material found in verses 4-5, 11, this material covers what will take place during the siege of the city.

Look, here is the Christ!

“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:5, NRSV)

“And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:11, NRSV)

An Application Moment

This is the third time Jesus has made this point, why? It seems that this has been an ongoing problem from Deuteronomy to Matthew and to our own generation.

“But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.” You may say to yourself, “How can we recognize a word that the LORD has not spoken?” If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.” (Deuteronomy 18:20–22, NRSV)

⁸¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 915.

⁸² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 915.

⁸³ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 978). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

In our generation, in a way not as serious as this, we have ministers that do at least similar things, they teach, preach and write books about when Jesus is coming and the “signs of the times.” They are always wrong “*the thing does not take place or prove true*” and then we respond by doing what? By going to their next prophecy conference and by buying their next book. The false prophets, or at least these confused teachers, become incredibly rich. Why? Is it because the world is throwing money at them? No, it is because Christians are rewarding them with millions of dollars for speaking falsehoods. Of course, most do not intentionally lie, but their present error should alert them and us that something is wrong, and both should take action. They should stop writing and we should stop listening because—“*the thing does not take place or prove true*”.

Matthew 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

For false christs and false prophets.... The threat is from Israel, “false christs” and from the Church, “false prophets.”

signs and wonders.... “And such miraculous proofs were, according to Josephus, offered by several of the nationalist leaders: he mentions specifically the parting the Jordan (*Ant.* 20.97),⁸⁴ the collapse of the city walls (*Ant.* 20.170),⁸⁵ the uncovering of Moses’ sacred vessels (*Ant.* 18.85),⁸⁶ as well as more generally “conspicuous wonders and signs” (*Ant.* 20.168),⁸⁷ and God-given “signs of freedom” (*War* 2.259)⁸⁸.⁸⁹ These illustrations by Josephus are not to suggest that these incidents were the exact

⁸⁴ “Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; (98) and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem. (99) This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus’s government.” Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 531.

⁸⁵ “He said farther, that he would show them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down.” Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 536.

⁸⁶ “But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without tumults. The man who excited them to it, was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived everything so, that the multitude might be pleased; so he bade them get together upon Mount Gerizzim, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them that, when they were come thither, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there.” Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 482.

⁸⁷ “...”and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishments of their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them.” Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 536.

⁸⁸ “These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government, and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty; (260) but Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.” Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 614.

⁸⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 916–917.

incidents Jesus is here addressing but simply to illustrate the types of things happening in this period, things that corresponded to Jesus' prophecy.

elect.... Matthew uses elect four times, three in this chapter: 22:14; 24:22, 24:24, 24:31. Verse 24 suggests that the false Christs and prophets will be so convincing that if not protected by God, even believers would be taken in. Are you taken in?

Matthew 24:25 See, I have told you beforehand. "They have been forewarned (v. 25), and their memory of Jesus' miracles ought to enable them to see the difference."⁹⁰

Matthew 24:26 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.

As the Roman armies' approach Judea and surround Jerusalem, there are only two places to **look** for these false christs, the **wilderness** where they might flee from the Romans (verse 16) or a secret and hopefully secure **inner room** soon to be surrounded by the Romans. The true Christ will not be found in either location. By then, he will have ascended to the Father and his coming in judgment will soon be visible for all to see, not simply those in a wilderness place or those in a private meeting in an inner room.

Matthew 24:27 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.

lightning.... The image here is of suddenness. This verse is interesting and suggest two possible interpretations.

One, Jesus' judgment coming was quick light lightning; the armies of Titus and Rome struck Jerusalem and the Temple swiftly and with vengeance. This fits the context well for after all Jesus previously said "... *all these things will come upon this generation.*" (Matthew 23:36, ESV) and will again say, "...*this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*" (Matthew 24:34, ESV). Our verse here, 24:27, fits right in the middle therefore, it must address events in the time frame of that generation—AD 30 to AD 70.

Two, but, how does this speak to lightning? It would seem that lightning would speak to the instantaneous appearance of Jesus on the last day—not to a 3 ½ year war or a 5-month coming for the last phase of that battle. But, instantaneous is only one of two possible meanings here. The other meaning speaks to an event that is not to be missed. In this second case, it is not the time element that is addressed but the visibility element. As the visibility of lightning is so obvious that it cannot be missed, so is the judgment coming of Jesus.

The idea would be this; the false christs of 24:26 are hidden in the desert or an inner room. But that is not the way Jesus is coming. His coming will be visible for all to see, not just for a few to see in a hidden place. "Jesus emphasizes unmistakable visibility in the sky as opposed to hiddenness in the wilderness or backrooms (26:64)."⁹¹

⁹⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 917.

⁹¹ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 108.

Effort in looking for Jesus in the desert or an inner room does not correspond to the context, to the visibility of the coming of Jesus. So, the fact of his lightning coming excludes these efforts to look for Jesus in some near or far location. No looking will be required on that day; it will be visible to all. So, do not believe it. The judgment coming will come with visible “signs” (24:3, 24, 30).

The nature of this image addresses the “impossibility of remaining unaware of the lightning strike: its visibility is comprehensive. This is how it will be with the coming of the Son of Man, and this is why claims of a secret appearance of the Christ will always be false claims.”⁹² You won’t need to look in secret places for the Christ, his appearance will be sudden and open for all to see. And, there will be no secretive rapture; there is nothing secret about this coming; it is visible, and it is noisy.

coming (παρουσία parousía)⁹³.... The word parousia was used in 24:3,

“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 (παρουσία parousía) and of the end of the age?”” (Matthew 24:3, ESV).

The word is now used again.

For many, the use of **parousía** can only mean the end of the world. However, not every use of **coming** (παρουσία parousía) refers to the last coming of Jesus at the end of time.

“I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence,” (1 Corinthians 16:17, ESV)

“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.” (2 Corinthians 7:6–7, ESV)

“For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”” (2 Corinthians 10:10, ESV)

“so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.” (Philippians 1:26, ESV)

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” (Philippians 2:12, ESV)

Many other uses of (παρουσία parousía) do reference the coming of Jesus, however, in many cases it is not at all clear which coming is discussed. For many, the very use of *parousia* means the last coming of Jesus and for them it can mean nothing else, but that point is not proven, just assumed. Only the context can determine which coming, a

⁹² Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 980). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁹³ *coming παρουσία* “...to come to be present at a particular place—‘to come, to arrive, to come to be present.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

judgment coming or the last coming. So, don't get trapped in an unproven or unprovable argument.

Matthew 24:28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

There is a relationship between the coming of the Son of Man and **corpse** and **vultures**. What is it?

vultures.... Either *vulture* or *eagle* could be the translation here. The presence of corpses suggest vulture—although eagles are also scavengers. However, the presence of corpses and Romans, with their eagle banners, is also possible. It is the Romans who are creating the corpses.

So, there are at least two ways of understanding this verse. *One*, as a follow up on the previous verse, "...the *parousia* of the Son of Man will be as obvious as the presence of the carcass."⁹⁴ "People will be able to miss the *parousia* no more than the vultures overlook a dead animal."⁹⁵ This fits well with the last verse that speaks of the not to be missed visibility of the coming of the Son of Man. Or *two*, "as depicting the "corpse" of Jerusalem surrounded by the "eagles" (military standards) of the Roman army...."⁹⁶

In addition, it is important to note that this verse is a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. God told Israel what would happen if they broke the covenant. And not only did they break the covenant, they murdered the covenant giver.

"And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away." (Deuteronomy 28:26, ESV)

Verse 24:28 is a clear fulfillment of this Deuteronomy passage. This may be the central point.

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

⁹⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 918.

⁹⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 199.

⁹⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 919.



Immediately or **without delay**. “For the most part in Greek and always in the NT εὐθέως [immediately] (straight, direct) has a temporal sense and means the immediately following future. In Matthew the adverb almost always has a pregnant meaning (“at once,” “immediately following”) and is not simply a rhetorical embellishment.”⁹⁷ “‘Immediately’ denies a temporal gap between “the affliction of those days” and the celestial disasters that will accompany the Son of Man’s publicly visible coming.”⁹⁸

after⁹⁹.... Or, **in the midst, with, among**, implying accompaniment. So, not **after** the tribulation, but **in the middle of** it. However, even if one were to prefer “after” as the proper translation of this word, “‘Immediately’ does not usually make room for much of a time gap—certainly not a gap of over 2000 years”¹⁰⁰ What will happen next is in close proximity with what just occurred.

tribulation.... This is the fourth and last time Matthew uses this word.

“yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” (Matthew 13:21, ESV)

“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.” (Matthew 24:9, ESV)

⁹⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005).

⁹⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 107.

⁹⁹ *after*.... μετά “Its primary meaning is mid, amid, in the midst, with, among, implying accompaniment....” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 141.

“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.” (Matthew 24:21, ESV)

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” (Matthew 24:29, ESV)

Matthew 13:21 appears to be a generic use of tribulation. However, Matthew 24:9, 21, 29 appear to be specific to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Book of Revelation uses this word five times. The first four could be generic but 7:14 appears to be specific to our context here in Matthew.

“I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14, ESV)

of those days.... This refers to the days Jesus has been addressing from 23:37 to 24:28.

“And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!” (Matthew 24:19, ESV)

“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.” (Matthew 24:22, ESV)

the sun..., the moon..., the stars.... Now back to **immediately**: “...it is supposed that “immediately after the distress [tribulation] of those days” simply cannot be allowed to mean what it says, since the sun and moon do still shine, heaven has not collapsed, and the Son of Man has not come on the clouds of heaven.”¹⁰¹

Context and audience are foundational considerations to understanding what a given passage addresses. The context is the destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem and Judea. The audience is Jesus’ disciples who have ask for details about this event.

With this in mind, what would these disciples have heard when this was said? In the context of their life, Judaism and the Old Testament, one is immediately drawn to these very ideas in Isaiah.

“For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.” (Isaiah 13:10, ESV)

“All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.” (Isaiah 34:4, ESV)

This language was used in the Old Testament to describe the end of Babylon, Edom and Jerusalem in the 6th century BC. “If such language was appropriate to describe the

¹⁰¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 921). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

end of Babylon or Edom under the judgment of God, why should it not equally describe God's judgment on Jerusalem's temple and the power structure which it symbolized?"¹⁰²

In addition, they would no doubt consider these additional passages:

"When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 32:7–8, ESV)

"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight." (Amos 8:9, ESV)

"The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining." (Joel 2:10, ESV)

"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." (Joel 2:30–31, ESV)

"The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining." (Joel 3:15, ESV)

Some of these very verses are quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost—**about 52 days from when this information is given to Peter here on the Mount of Olives.** And like Jesus here, he is pointing to the present and near future as the context and fulfillment of these verses.

"But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:" And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:16–21, ESV)

Peter is telling his audience that the behavior of those filled with the Holy Spirit begins the fulfillment of these very verses. So, Jesus, Joel and Peter are all addressing the same days in speaking of the days of blessing and judgment.

*"When Jesus borrows Isaiah's imagery it is reasonable to understand it in a similar sense. If such language was appropriate to describe the end of Babylon or Edom under the judgment of God, why should it not equally describe God's judgment on Jerusalem's temple and the power structure which it symbolized?"¹⁰³ *"The sun shall be darkened.... That is, the Jewish heaven shall perish, and the sun and moon of its glory and**

¹⁰² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 922.

¹⁰³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 922). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

happiness shall be darkened, and brought to nothing. The *sun* is the religion of the church; the *moon* is the government of the state; and the *stars* are the judges and doctors of both.”¹⁰⁴

“Language about cosmic collapse, then, is used by the OT prophets to symbolize God’s acts of judgment within history, with the emphasis on catastrophic political reversals.”¹⁰⁵ The **sun**, **moon** and **stars** refer to the political, religious and social leaders of the nation. Stars, moon and sun appear on many of the flags of the nations around the world, including the flags of Israel and the United States. These symbols commonly represent the nations of the world. Even in the Book of Genesis we read:

“Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” (Genesis 37:9, ESV)

In the passage we learn that there were symbols for the government of the family.

“But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” (Genesis 37:10, ESV)

So, now in Israel, these personages, represented in the sun, moon and stars are all going to fall, leaving the nation undefended and unable to resist their enemies. “The language that Jesus uses is typical of Old Testament imagery where stellar phenomena represent people and nations.”¹⁰⁶ “The language used by Jesus in Matthew 24 was familiar. The disciples had heard it before. They knew what Jesus meant when He described the sun and moon going dark and the stars falling from the sky. The end of the nation was at hand.”¹⁰⁷ The world of first century Israel will soon go dark.

Matthew 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth [land] will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

In Daniel we saw a similar scene, however, in that story Jesus in coming to the Father.

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV)

This scene in Daniel finds its fulfillment about 40 after the resurrection and 10 days prior to Pentecost.

¹⁰⁴ John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, Matthew-1 Corinthians, Matthew-Mark* (vol. 2; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 319–320.

¹⁰⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 922.

¹⁰⁶ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 143.

¹⁰⁷ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 149.

“And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9, ESV)

However, our passage here in Matthew 24 takes place 40 years later during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 40 and therefore does not appear to be related to Daniel 7 except by common apocalyptic language.

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man....

Then.... Only after these prior events occur will this next event occur.

appear.... “...to become visible to someone—“to appear, to become visible.”¹⁰⁸

heaven.... Or *the sky*.

the sign¹⁰⁹.... Jesus was asked about a sign in verse 24:3 and began to address the ***sign*** question in verse 15, but this verse is now the first time he uses it again. Some people read this as “then will ***appear*** in heaven ***the Son of Man***” and that may be the intent of the verse, it is really not clear, and it does not seem to make a great deal of difference. If there is a sign that is not the coming of the Son of Man, then there are two things to see at that moment.

The disciples did ask for ***the sign*** of Jesus’ coming and of the end of the age. Interestingly, in about two days, Jesus will tell those who are about to murder him:

“...you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matthew 26:64, ESV)

To his judges he says, “you will see the Son of Man.” But in this passage, he says, “then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man.” Jesus is not saying that everyone will see the Son of Man, just some, but all will see ***the sign*** of his coming.

But if we limit this appearing to a ***sign***, then what sign appeared in the heaven? There are indications, but we are not certain. Although those that were alive then would not have had a problem with understanding the sign of Jesus’ coming in judgment on Israel, two-thousand years later, we do. Perhaps, and perhaps is about all we can say at this point, but perhaps it is what Josephus reports:

...a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared [24:30]; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw [24:30] it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals [signs]; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities.¹¹⁰

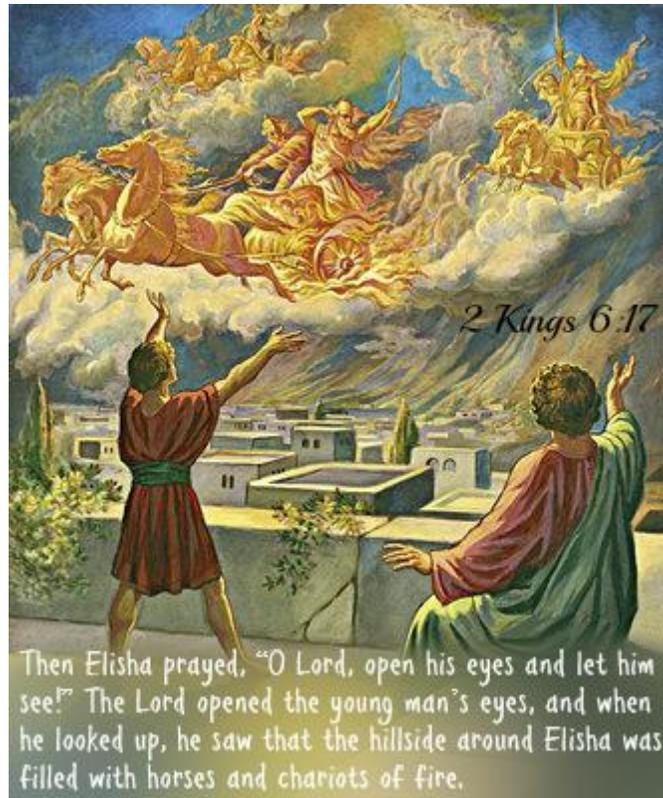
This scene was portrayed in an earlier episode in Scripture when Elisha prayed that his servant might see the armies of God around Samaria. The big difference between the

¹⁰⁸ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁰⁹ *Sign, σημεῖον*, Sign, mark, token, miracle with a spiritual end and purpose. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹¹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Wars, 6:5:3.

two scenes is that in the first one, God is protecting his people and in the second one, God is waging war on his people.



We see this second scene in the Book of Revelation:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." (Revelation 19:11–16, ESV)



the sign.... The sign would be the chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities.¹¹¹ “The standard [sign], the banner of the Son of Man, unfurls in the heavens, as he himself returns in splendor and power.”¹¹²

and then all the tribes of the earth [land] will mourn [κόπτω]....

earth or land.... “...it is essential to understand that the word, here translated **earth** ... is the Greek word γῆ (*gḗ*) which should be translated “land” in this passage. The proof of that is found in the word **tribes**. The **tribes** spoken of are the tribes of Israel, and the “land” is the land of Israel.

“Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28, ESV)

“It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—” (Revelation 21:12, ESV)

mourn¹¹³.... Or **wail** or **lament**. **If you ever wondered if Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation were telling the same story, consider this passage in Revelation:**

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth [land] will wail [κόπτω] on account of him. Even so. Amen.” (Revelation 1:7, ESV)

¹¹¹ Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Wars, 6:5:3.

¹¹² Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 505). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹¹³ *mourn* κόπτω, “...to strike or beat one's body, particularly the breast, with the hands in lamentation, to lament, wail...” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

This mourning is not some kind of crying while rejoicing; there is no rejoicing, they are wailing in panic and fear. This use of the word for mourn is illustrated in the crowd that followed Jesus to the cross.

“And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning [κόπτω] and lamenting for him.” (Luke 23:27, ESV)

“The witnesses of the “*Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven*” will be “*all the tribes of the land,*” who will greet his vindication not with acclamation but with mourning.”¹¹⁴

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn....” (Zechariah 12:10–12, ESV)

“Jesus’ words here suggest then, in the light of their OT background, that the people of Jerusalem will recognize what they have done to their Messiah, but their mourning will be prompted by seeing his eventual vindication and triumph, when it will be too late to avert the consequences of having rejected him.”¹¹⁵

they will see the Son of Man.... Just recently we talked about the sign that the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw. The “chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities.” The standard [sign], the banner of the Son of Man, unfurls in the heavens, as he himself returns in splendor and power.”¹¹⁶ But although some only saw the sign as reported by Josephus, others saw “the Son of Man” as well.

coming on the clouds.... Coming on the clouds is an apocalyptic phrase found in scripture meaning that people will see the judgment of God and recognize that this judgment is a coming of God judgment, making war on them. When they see the judgment clouds of God, they are to see the Son of Man.

“An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.” (Isaiah 19:1, ESV)

“For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. A sword shall come upon Egypt, and anguish shall be in Cush, when the slain fall in Egypt, and her wealth is carried away, and her foundations are torn down.” (Ezekiel 30:3–4, ESV)

“The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness

¹¹⁴ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 924). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹¹⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 925). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹¹⁶ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 505). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.” (Zephaniah 1:14–16, ESV)

“Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.” (Psalm 18:7–15, ESV)

And soon Jesus himself will say:

“Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”” (Matthew 26:64, ESV)

John has a similar scene in Revelation where he describes a coming in judgment on Israel.

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.” (Revelation 14:14–16, ESV)

In seeing a judgment on Jerusalem, Israel is to recognize that God is coming on clouds, that is, God is coming to judge them. Some may have only seen the Romans, others the judgment clouds, others may have seen the scene mentioned by Josephus, and others may have actually seen the Son of Man. We cannot speak with certainty other than to say that Jesus came in judgment and appeared in various ways to the people of Jerusalem at that time.

Matthew 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The messengers (angels) or prophets of the Old Covenant have trumpeted the call of God, but the gathering of the Old Covenant community by means of the trumpet of God is now ended. But, Jesus has instituted a New Covenant in his blood (Matthew 26:26–29), and now the forty years of transition from the Old Covenant community to the New Covenant Church is complete. The destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem and Israel has ended the Old Covenant dispensation. It is now time to fully implement the New Covenant community and send out the new messengers (angles) of the Church, to again sound the trumpet call—not of judgment this time, but of the assembly of the new people of God, God’s elect found across the globe, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other—the Church of Jesus Christ.

Following the statement on the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven in judgment on Israel, we have verse 31 with four clauses which are:

- 1) *he will send out his angels*
- 2) *with a loud trumpet call*
- 3) *will gather his elect*
- 4) *from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*

At the time of the judgment of 24:30 or right after it, **he**, Jesus Christ, will send out angels.

angels.... There is an abundance of illustrations that angels, messengers, can be either heavenly beings or human beings. Which one here? These are the angles of the seven churches found in Revelation chapters 2-3. They are the messengers of God, the evangelists and pastors of the New Covenant.

“To the angel [messenger] of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’ (Revelation 2:1, ESV)

trumpet¹¹⁷.... In the Scripture, trumpets generally sound for one of two reasons. One, calling Israel to war. Two, calling Israel to worship.

The trumpets war of God’s judgment found in the Book of Revelation have all sounded.

Revelation 8:2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Revelation 8:6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

Revelation 8:13 And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

Revelation 9:14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

These trumpets have now grown silent, but here is another trumpet that will sound on the last day. This trumpet will be the greatest call to worship ever sounded in human history.

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

¹¹⁷ *trumpet* *σάλπιγξ* “...the sound made by a trumpet—‘trumpet blast, trumpet sound.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

This trumpet is for the last day in human history and has not sounded yet.

In between the trumpets of judgment and the trumpets of the triumphant conclusion of human history are the trumpets of a holy convocation, the ingathering of the New Covenant community of God—a call to worship.

“Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation.” (Leviticus 23:24, ESV)

“Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp.” (Numbers 10:2, ESV)

“On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets,” (Numbers 29:1, ESV)

gather¹¹⁸.... Jesus sought to gather the children of Israel to himself, but they would not.

“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! Matthew 23:37

Paul uses this word in an eschatological context for our gathering on the last day when that last trumpet is sounded.

“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,” (2 Thessalonians 2:1, ESV)

A variation of the word is found in Jewish worship in the word *sunagōgē*¹¹⁹ or synagogue, the place of gathering for worship. It is somewhat in this sense that the word is used here and in fact James uses this term to describe the church saying:

*“For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, (*sunagōgē*) and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,”* (James 2:2, ESV)

The Church commonly also used the term *ekklēsia*¹²⁰ which essentially means the same thing.

The Jews continued to use this term *sunagōgē*, but Jesus rejected their gathering and called them “a synagogue of Satan.”

¹¹⁸ *gather* ἐπισυνάγω “...to cause to come together to, toward, or at a particular location—‘to cause to come together, to gather together.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹¹⁹ συναγωγή *sunagōgē*; A gathering, congregation, synagogue Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹²⁰ ἐκκλησία *ekklēsia* “...to call out. It was a common term for a congregation...” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”
(Revelation 2:9, ESV)

James use of assembly is the sense in which we are now gathered to God—“*they will gather together His elect*” (Matthew 24:31).

elect.... The elect are the children of God, believers.

the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. “The four-winds imagery is designed to include all directions ... as far as the heavenly vault reaches, so far will the angels go to gather the elect in.”¹²¹

Summarizing Matthew 24:31

Let’s be careful to view this verse in its context. The flow of the passage goes like this:

- 1) First, we find the judgment of Israel and Jerusalem in 24:29-30.
- 2) This is followed by the story on the angles and a trumpet call, and the gathering of the New Covenant elect in 24:31.
- 3) Then, we are introduced to the parable of the fig tree which shows the momentary completion of the material on the judgment on Israel (24:32).

An explanation that fails to explain verses 24:29-30 and 24:32 must be suspect.

In 24:29-30 we have a vivid picture of the judgment of God on Israel.

In 24:32 we have a parable on the nearness of the completion of this judgment.

In the middle of these, in 24:31 we are told what God will do after the completion of this judgment on the Temple and its religion—he will send his ministers across the globe to gather a new people of God, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The gathering of the Old Covenant community by means of their messengers and trumpets, God has now destroyed. But, Jesus has instituted a New Covenant in his blood (Matthew 26:26-29), it is now time to fully implement the New Covenant community and send out the messengers (angles) of the Church, to again sound the trumpet call—not of judgment this time, but of the assembly of the new people of God, God’s elect found across the globe, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other—the Church of Jesus Christ.

Consider 24:31 in the light of verses 23:36 and 24:34

“Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Matthew 23:36, ESV)

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

¹²¹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 986). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Whatever interpretation one comes up with for verse 31, it must fit within the framework of 23:36 and 24:34, something that happened in that generation.

Matthew 24:32 *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.*

Summary of the Answer to the Disciples’ Question (24:32–35)

“Jesus’ answer to the question *“When will these things happen?”* (is rounded off with three final comments:

- (i) As surely as summer follows spring you may be sure that the preliminary events I have mentioned will lead directly to the “end” (vv. 32–33);
- (ii) It will all be over before this generation is finished (v. 34);
- (iii) You can rely on my prediction (v. 35).¹²²

Matthew 24:34 is especially important in helping us determine what this section is all about.

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

These comments “rule out decisively any suggestion that the preceding verses ... are concerned with some more ultimate “end” than the destruction of the temple which the disciples had asked about.”¹²³

From the fig tree learn its lesson.... “The thrust here is, ‘Let the fig tree become your teacher’.”¹²⁴ Unlike other plants, the fig tree blooms very late in Spring. So, when it does Summer is upon you. Any other plant might have suggested that Summer will soon arrive, the blooming of the fig tree says that Summer is upon you.

as soon as.... Jesus is using a simile here, comparing one thing with another, i.e. the leaves and summer with the coming fulfillment of his predictions. You can see the leaves and conclude that summer is near. You can see the destructive events he has just referenced and therefore know that the fulfillment “is near” (verse 33).

Matthew 24:33 *So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*

you see.... Jesus was addressing a specific audience, his disciples. They were the ones who would see this.

all these things

“But he answered them, “You see all these [things], do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”” (Matthew 24:2, ESV)

¹²² France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 928). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹²³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 929). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹²⁴ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 987). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will [all] these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”” (Matthew 24:3, ESV)

“So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” (Matthew 24:33, ESV)

“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, ESV)

This phrase, **these things**, is used four times in this passage. Verses 2 and 3 near the beginning and verses 33 and 34 near the end. They provide context and appear to be an inclusio,¹²⁵ a literary tool indicating context. The phrase “these things” clearly refer to the soon destruction of the temple, not to something that will happen two or three thousand years later.

he [it] is (εἶμι) near.... The word “*is*” is a verb in the third person singular. It could be translated he, she or it, depending on the context; a preceding noun or adjective would clarify which one. However, there is no preceding noun or adjective to provide a definitive answer at this point. So, there is nothing in this context that requires “he”. “It”, referring to the destruction of the Temple, appears to be a good translation as well—since this has been Jesus’ main topic all along. However, since 1) the destruction of the Temple, 2) a concomitant coming of Jesus, and 3) “the end” are all discussed in this chapter, each is possible. And all three are near.

at the very gates.... The fig tree illustration was a picture of the nearness of the fulfillment of Jesus message. This phrase, at the very gates, makes the same point. It is also suspicious, was Jesus referring to the Roman armies soon to be at the gates of Jerusalem?

Matthew 24:34 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

this generation¹²⁶.... It is not “that” generation that Jesus is speaking of, some generation in the distant future, but “**this**” very one. “Matthew uses **geneá** (γενεά) here for the tenth time. Though his use of the term has a range of emphases, it consistently refers to (the time span of) a single human generation. All the alternative senses proposed here (the Jewish people; humanity; the generation of the end-time signs; wicked people) are artificial and based on the need to protect Jesus from error. ‘This generation’ is the generation of Jesus’ contemporaries.”¹²⁷ ““This generation” ... can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ “In literature, inclusio is a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, which consists of creating a frame by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section....” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusio>

¹²⁶ *this generation geneá* (γενεά) “...people living at the same time and belonging to the same reproductive age-class—‘those of the same time, those of the same generation.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹²⁷ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (pp. 988–989). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹²⁸ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 507). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

“Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Matthew 23:36, ESV)

The phrase “*this generation*” is another inclusio around the content of material between these two verses, 23:36 and 24:34. The content spoken here by Jesus between these two verses is to occur in the generation of his then current audience. This helps us anchor that material in time.

pass away¹²⁹.... In an earlier chapter Jesus threatened judgment on that very generation saying:

“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:27–28, ESV)

take place¹³⁰.... In the aorist, as here, ***happen***.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Earlier Jesus said some similar in the Sermon on the Mount.

“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18, ESV)

“...Jesus asserts the fate of this generation as confidently as he insists on the continuing validity of every detail of the Mosaic Law; and Jesus’ own word is given the same enduring validity as the Mosaic Law.”¹³¹ This is a powerful statement.

Most of us are familiar with Matthew 24:35. But, as is so often the case, we are not necessarily familiar with the context. Here Jesus is saying that although the universe might pass away, the material he has just taught his disciples will not pass away or fail to come to pass. One can hardly overestimate the intensity and certainty that Jesus is using to make his point. This WILL happen! And it did in that very generation.

I think we can safely conclude that the material addressed prior to verses 34 and 35 will see their fulfilment in the 40 years between Jesus death and the destruction of Jerusalem. Our next challenge will be to determine how the next section is to be understood.

I think this would be a good time to remind us of something said just three days earlier:

“And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away.

¹²⁹ *pass away* *παρέρχομαι* “...to mark the passage of time, with focus upon completion—‘to pass, to have passed, past.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹³⁰ *take place* *γίνομαι* “...to come to acquire or experience a state—‘to become.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹³¹ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 988). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." (Matthew 21:19–22, NKJV)

By the end of the following 40 years, I believe the disciples had come to the point that they could pray that prayer: *Be removed and be cast into the sea*. And so it was done, Israel was uprooted and cast into the Gentile world, the "sea" of Biblical prophecy.