



## A Preterist Study of the Olivet Discourse

When Will These Things Be?  
A Preterist Study of the Olivet Discourse

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Living Hope Press

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When Will These Things Be?

# ***When Will These Things Be?***

***A Preterist Study of the Olivet Discourse***

Matthew 21–25  
(Mark 13; Luke 21)

by

Ralph E. Bass, Jr.

Living Hope Press  
Greenville, SC USA

To

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### ***Forward***

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In our age, several prophetic themes are addressed year after year by a plethora of "end-of-the-world" speakers and writers. Here are some of the high points: 1) Jesus is going to rapture the Church soon. 2) He will take his people to heaven for seven years. 3) During that period, Israel will rebuild their Temple. 4) At which time, there will be a great tribulation. 5) At this time, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines will be all over the world. 6) The antichrist will rise and attack Israel. 7) At the end of seven years, Jesus will come back and destroy the antichrist.

These are just the highlights; of course, other points flesh out the story as is popularly told. However, here is a good question, where does the bible teach these things? The answer by many is that much on these subjects is taught right here in the Olivet Discourse. It is here that many of these details are all spelled out: wars, rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, tribulation, betrayal, and more. So, there!

Please note, some of Christianity's finest theologians agree that this end is coming in this very way; one scholar says, "This leads to an important issue. The Jesus who told us we could not know the day or the hour also *told us to look for the signs of the time* (cf. Mark 13). The latter days will be marked by earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars, false messiahs, and the appearance of the antichrist. When the gospel has been preached to all the nations, then we will be on the edge of the consummation. Such indications will alert us to the fact that Christ is about to return."<sup>1</sup> Comments like this are not from a wild-eyed radical Adventist but from a giant in the mainline of evangelical Christianity. Something is seriously amiss.

The problem with all these "signs of the times" is the simple fact that a lot of this: *has already happened*. Don't get me wrong; Jesus is coming again; the Bible is clear on that. However, much of the detail

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<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 213–214.

associated with his coming is confusing, and much of what is clear—is wrong.

### Was He Wrong?

And here is one more discouraging points. "The world" is aware of our "attempts" to reconcile Jesus' teachings on his return and, what they consider to be, his failure to do so. Bertrand Russell summed up this way:

I am concerned with Christ as he appears in the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that He believed that His coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of His earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching.<sup>2</sup>

Russell concluded that Jesus was simply wrong about all this. "If Jesus was wrong on the timing of His coming, Russell concludes, then His moral worldview should be questioned as well. Jesus' moral teaching is based on His character. If His character is flawed, so is His morality."<sup>3</sup>

This is what hangs in the balance on this issue. Did Jesus come again in the lifetime of some of his disciples, or did he not? Was he wrong?

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<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 47.

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***Preface***

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The book before you is about Jesus' *Olivet Discourse*. Jesus' ministry opened with his detailed explanation of how he wants his people to live in his kingdom. He imparts his blessings on living in concord with the stipulations of his kingdom—as taught in the *Sermon on the Mount*. Before Calvary, Jesus concluded his ministry with a detailed explanation of how disobedience to kingdom instructions results in covenant curses to Israel. And much of that is in the *Olivet Discourse*.

Much earlier, God entered into a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel. There he spelled out the blessings of obedience to the covenant's stipulations as given to Moses in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. He also recorded the sanctions or curses for covenant disobedience in Deuteronomy in 28:15-68.

God does so again in the Book of Matthew, the *Sermon on the Mount* is his blessings and instructions for covenant obedience, and the *Olivet Discourse* is his curses for covenant disobedience.

The Book of Matthew is a history of the establishment of the New Covenant. *The Olivet Discourse* is a final prophetic statement on God's coming sanctions on Israel for breaking the old covenant.

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## *Introduction*

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### **An Outline of the Olivet Discourse?**

The book before us on the Olivet Discourse is an extensive study on the judgments that befell Israel for failing to keep the stipulations of the old covenant and for their murder of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. This discourse comes at the end of Jesus' ministry right before his crucifixion.

The Olivet Discourse follows Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in chapters 21-23 of Matthew. As Jesus finishes the last woe in chapter 23, he transitions into this discourse.

With that background, we ask, how should we outline the Olivet Discourse? Outlines, done well, are valuable tools that unpack material often hidden from the reader. But the task of outlining the Olivet Discourse has often proved to be a problem. Is there a solution to this problem? I believe there is. It is found in the *inclusios*<sup>4</sup> that make up the content of our material. This literary approach for determining the outline of this discourse will provide the reader with the best tool for determining how the passage is to be understood—what happens soon, later, and at the end of time. The *inclusios* significantly contribute to our understanding of these events.

Along with the *inclusios*, the disciples' three opening questions help determine the outline of this discourse.

*"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)*

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<sup>4</sup> Inclusio. "In biblical studies, 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>

## The Inclusios

The inclusios provide a natural division of the material in the Olivet Discourse.

The First inclusio is identified with the two phrases “*all these things*” and “*this generation*,” they are found in Matthew 23:36 and 24:34.

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

*“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, NKJV)*

The material between these inclusios addresses the *when* and the *what* of the disciples’ questions and begins with the revealing phrases, “*all these things*” will come upon “*this generation*.” The “when” is “this generation.”

In this first inclusio, Jesus addresses the coming first-century judgment on Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple. The Jews rebelled against Rome in AD 66, and Nero ordered Vespasian to put down the revolt soon after that. Vespasian arrived in Israel and began his campaign in the spring of AD 67. The Romans burned the Temple on August 30 of AD 70, but the city was not entirely destroyed till September 8 of that year, a period of 3 ½ years.<sup>5</sup> All this occurred in that first century “generation.”

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

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” (Matthew 24:36, NKJV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” (Matthew 25:13, NKJV)*

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege\\_of\\_Jerusalem\\_\(70\\_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE))

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A Third section is Matthew 25:14 to 25:46, which is a discussion on the final judgment at the end of time; it is in two parts:

- 1) Judgment on Israel: Matthew 25:14 to 25:30
- 2) Judgment on the Gentiles: Matthew 25:31 to 25:46

That brings us to the end of the Olivet Discourse.

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***Definitions Please!***

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One problem associated with any discussion on any topic is the lack of definitions. So, with that problem before us, let's put it to rest by defining our terms.

**Eschatology:** Eschatology refers to teachings concerning events in the last days. It is that part of theology concerned with the final events of human history or the ultimate destiny of humanity. It commonly deals with "end of the world" topics.

**Last Days:** Last Days addresses the end of a given period. There have been many periods and last days in Jewish history. The use of the phrase "last days" alerts us to the use of one of these periods but not in every case to the last day of world history.

**Prophecy:** Prophecy is of two kinds in scripture, 1) proclaiming God's word, 2) telling the future. Of this second, there are two results, 1) fulfilled prophecy, 2) prophecy not yet fulfilled.

**Millennium:** There are three major views on the millennium. It is considered either) a one thousand year period or 2) a period of undetermined length, but generally an extended one.

- 1) **Premillennialism:** This is a one thousand year period that will occur right after the second coming of Jesus.
- 2) **Postmillennialism:** This is a one thousand year period which is followed by the second coming of Jesus.
- 3) **Amillennennialism:** This is an undefined long period that is concurrent with the Church age.

**Dispensationalism:** "Dispensationalism is a theological system that teaches biblical history is best understood in light of a number of successive administrations of God's dealings with mankind, which it calls "dispensations." It maintains fundamental distinctions between God's plans for national Israel and for the New Testament Church. It emphasizes a pre-tribulation rapture of the church prior to a Great Tribulation; this is followed by Christ's Second Coming.

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Its beginnings are usually associated with the Plymouth Brethren movement in the UK and the teachings of John Nelson Darby.<sup>6</sup> It gained great popularity through the notes of C.I. Scofield's Reference Bible.

Some of the major teachings of Dispensationalism:

- 1) Israel and the Church are distinct entities. The Church is not the New Testament extension of Israel. There are two peoples of God with two different destinies, earthly Israel and the spiritual church.
- 2) The Old Testament prophecies about Israel are to be fulfilled at a future date by a literal Israel and not by the Church.
- 3) Human history is divided into seven periods in which God tests and judges humanity somewhat differently in each period.
- 4) There is a fundamental distinction between law and grace. In the Old Testament, Israel lived under the law; in the New Testament, the Church lives under grace. Law and grace in no way play complementary roles in bringing people to faith.
- 5) The New Testament Church is a parenthesis in God's plan, which is primarily with Israel.
- 6) There is a distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming. They do not happen at the same time. The Church is to be raptured seven years before the Second Coming of Jesus. At this point, God returns to dealing with Israel.
- 7) There will be a future rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem followed by a destruction of that Temple.

For Dispensationalism, the Olivet Discourse is a prophecy of coming events that extend to the end of the world. Because the first section of the Olivet Discourse (23:36-24:35) is clearly about the Temple's near destruction in AD 70, Dispensationalism must have two Temple destructions, one in AD 70 and a second in the distant future.

This explanation of coming events in biblical prophecy explains the hysteria in our day about rebuilding the Temple, something never mentioned in Scriptures but common in Dispensational circles.

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<sup>6</sup> Dispensationalism. <https://www.theopedia.com/dispensationalism>

## ***All Prophecy?***

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### ***Luke 17 and Matthew 24***

A third group is perhaps even more confused about the Olivet Discourse than the Dispensationalists; they are the unorthodox preterists. They would draw our attention to Luke 17 and compare it to Matthew 24. They would insist that because Matthew 24 puts the events of Luke 17:20-37 in a different order, therefore, Matthew 24 cannot address both a 1<sup>st</sup>-century fulfillment and an end-of-the-world fulfillment. According to them, all must be fulfilled in the period of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. They have no “end of the world” theology.

Why? What is their agenda? The unorthodox preterists want to insist that *all* Bible prophecy was fulfilled by AD 70; there is *no* prophecy left to be fulfilled in Scripture after AD 70. That includes the Lord’s final coming in history and the final judgment of all people. That is why they are called unorthodox; such a position has been foreign to orthodox Christianity for 2000 years.

This Luke 17 argument about Matthew 24, they believe, helps them support that claim. At first reading, it sounds plausible, but upon a closer examination, it is found to be incorrect.

As indicated, they argue that because the order of events in Luke 17 compared to Matthew 24 is different, therefore, all of Matthew 24 and 25 must be focusing on an AD 70 judgment. And thus, as their argument goes, we no longer have any warrant for separating the two comings of Christ—an early judgment coming in AD 70 and a final coming at the end of time. *All* were fulfilled in AD 70, or so they say. But consider....

Let’s look at the context of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24 and that of Luke 17. In Matthew 24, Jesus is answering two recent questions from the disciples. The disciples assume that the destruction of the temple, which Jesus just addressed, also means the world’s destruction (Matt 24:1–3). But in Matthew 24, he separates the temple’s destruction from His final coming at the end of time. We see him drawing the line between those judgments in Matthew 24:34-35 and Matthew 24:36.

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*“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”*  
(Matthew 24:34–35, NKJV)

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”* (Matthew 24:36, NKJV)

These unorthodox preterists try to use Luke 17 to make one fulfillment of all prophecies. They fail to note that Matthew 24 was given on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24:3). While the Luke 17 address was given on an entirely different occasion, one right after Jesus had left Galilee (cf. Lk 17:11; 18:31; 19:11).

In Matthew, Jesus is answering his disciples regarding their question about the temple's future (Mt 24:1–3). In Luke 17, he is interacting with the Pharisees (Lk 17:20–23) about the coming of the kingdom. Jesus is not commenting on the temple in Luke 17, as he does in Matthew 24:1–2. These are two different occasions that discuss related but not identical issues.

And very importantly, Luke has his own version of the Olivet Discourse; it is found *four chapters later*; it is *not* in Luke 17 but in Luke 21!

Comparing Luke 17 and Matthew 24 is an argument that compares apples with oranges, all the while pretending to make a fair comparison. But it is, in fact, misleading.

To compare Luke 21 with Matthew 24 is reasonable and helpful, for they speak the same message. But to compare Jesus's teaching during his trip to Jerusalem in Luke 17 with the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 as if they are addressing the same event—that is dishonest. It represents the efforts of those hard-pressed to win an argument—one not found in the Bible.

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## ***Background – Matthew 21-23***

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### ***The Last Week of Jesus' Life***

The Olivet Discourse has often been taught as if it jumped whole from the pages of Matthew with no context. As a result, for some, it comes across as a stand-alone document that can be interpreted as an entirely new idea, not one in harmony with the larger part of Matthew. For this reason, the Olivet Discourse fails to convince some of its first-century point of view.

During this final week of his life, Jesus' actions and teachings were not referencing things that were going to happen to Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple some 2000 years later, but instead what would happen to Israel in "*this generation*" [Matthew 23:36, 24:34]. Understanding this context will help the reader place Jesus' teachings into the milieu of His life—first-century Israel.

As a result, it will prove to be helpful to present an overview of Matthew 21-23, the Passion week of Jesus' life, the week in which he preaches this Sermon. Because I want to focus on Jesus' message in the Olivet Discourse in chapters 24-25, I will not do a full explanation of chapters 21-23 but a synopsis. That will serve my purpose.

In the Book of Daniel, we find a description of this historic moment in Jesus' life. Daniel speaks of "*an anointed one*" that "*shall be cut off*," with the destruction of "*the city and sanctuary*" soon to follow. We read:

*"And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed."* (Daniel 9:26, ESV)

Daniel 9:26 explains what this week in Israel, and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem that will follow in AD 70, is all about. You will notice that the destruction of *the city and the sanctuary* occurs in proximation to the *anointed one* that is *cut off* or the death of Jesus Christ. Really, that verse should settle the question of the prophetic

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timing of the destruction of the city and Temple (sanctuary). Simply put, the destruction of the city and the sanctuary as recorded in Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 were juxtaposed with the cutting off of the anointed one, Jesus Christ.

### **The Setting**

That last week of Jesus' life consists of several significant interactions between Jesus and the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. Although many additional points are made in these three chapters, there is one point common to them all, the judgment of the then-current generation to which Jesus was preaching—it draws near!

## Matthew Chapter 21

### The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)

***“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”***  
(Matthew 21:5, NKJV)

On a Sunday, the first day of the week, Jesus made his Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Although Jesus said nothing during this entrance into the city, his actions symbolically spoke to the people and their leaders. It was what theologians call “*prophetic theater*.” “The message conveyed to the city’s inhabitants is unmistakable: the long-awaited messiah—the *true* King of the Jews—has come to free Israel from its bondage.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***Jesus Cleanses the Temple (21:12–17)*** (Mark 11:11-19, Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22)

***“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.”*** (Matthew 21:12, NKJV)

Jesus went to His Temple and drove out the money changers (Matthew 21:12). John gives us greater detail.

*“In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ”*  
(John 2:14–16, ESV)

Why did he do this? It was because “The temple was not fulfilling its God-ordained role as witness to the nations but had become, like the

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<sup>7</sup> Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, New York, NY: Random House, (2013), 74.

first temple, the premier symbol of a superstitious belief that God would protect and rally his people irrespective of their conformity to his will.”<sup>8</sup> His *ownership* of the Temple was the basis of his cleansing of it.

### **Jesus Curses the Fig Tree (21:18-22)**

***“Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. 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.” (Matthew 21:18–19, NKJV)***

The next day, Jesus follows up his first day’s actions with his cursing of the fig tree—more *prophetic theater*. The leaves on the fig tree proclaimed a message of health and success, *as did the Jews in Jesus’ day*. These Jews “viewed themselves as the chosen people, as those to whom God had committed his law and as the servants of God in a way people of no other nation were. But they were not bringing forth fruit worthy of such a position.”<sup>9</sup> This is what Jesus is addressing.

In Jesus’ story of the fig tree, he is explaining how Israel has outward indicators of true religion but not the substance and work. The leaves suggest the propriety of expecting true and visible faith; the lack of fruit demonstrates the hypocrisy of a nation playing religion.

### **Jesus’ and John the Baptist’s Authority Questioned (21:23–27)**

***“Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”” (Matthew 21:23, NKJV)***

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, *“Matthew,”* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 442.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1992), 530.

The religious leaders are astounded by Jesus's actions in cleansing the temple; they want to know—***who gave you this authority?*** Since they were the official representatives of the Temple and the religion of Israel, they understood what *their authority* was and who gave it to them, but who authorized Jesus to do these things?

Jesus responds with a question of his own.

***“I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”***  
**(Matthew 21:24, NKJV)**

So, Jesus responded, You want to talk about authority? Then let's talk about authority! “What was the source of John's authority?” Was John “*a man sent from God*” (John 1:6), or was he a self-proclaimed prophet, a charlatan? “The right response to a heaven-sent gift is to “believe” its bearer, which here means believe John, his message of repentance, and his promise of a messianic successor (3:7–12).”<sup>10</sup> They were to believe in the One he testified to!

Although they would like to gain the advantage of using John's name and pretending that they were his friend, in fact, all knew they had no use for John's ministry. So, they could not admit his ministry was from God. “If they respond, “From heaven,” then they are morally bound to believe John—and John pointed to Jesus.... *They would, therefore, have their answer about Jesus and his authority.*”<sup>11</sup> And that was the point of Jesus' question about John's authority. John's authority was from God, but it was not an answer that they could stomach.

They lied and said that they did not know where John's authority came from. They knew. But they could not answer; they were trapped.

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 372.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 447.

### ***The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28–32)***

***“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’”***  
(Matthew 21:28, NKJV)

Earlier [Matthew 21:23-27], the chief priests and the elders had asked Jesus a question concerning authority; here Jesus asks them a question concerning *obedience to authority*.

As we look at the first son, we note that there is no pretense of fidelity with him; simply rebellion, ***I will not***. But this son later regretted his decision. He believed that he has done something to be lamented; so, he changes his mind.

As for the second son: ***I go, sir***, this is the answer the father had expected, but this son proves to be deceptive. Obedience to God's will is expressed in *doing*, not simply *saying*.

By noting that ***tax collectors and the prostitutes*** enter the kingdom before them, Jesus is saying, “the scum of society, though it says no to God, repents, performs the Father's will, [will] enter the kingdom, whereas the religious authorities loudly say yes to God but never do what he says, and therefore they fail to enter.”<sup>12</sup> This was not a popular message.

### ***The Parable of the Tenants (21:33–46)***

***“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among***

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<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 450.

*themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”’ (Matthew 21:33–41, NKJV)*

Now Jesus puts before them another story. The **landowner** in the farming community was the property owner who would invest in preparing this vineyard.

We see that “the parable continues to make a statement against the Jewish religious authorities. The landowner is God, the vineyard Israel, the tenants the leaders of the nation, the servants the prophets, and the son is Jesus Messiah.”<sup>13</sup>

And in their treatment of the **servants**, Jesus alludes both to the Old Testament prophets and those yet to suffer at the hands of the Jews.

Then comes the story of the son: **‘They will respect my son’** [21:37]. The “meaning is clear: at the end of a long history of revelation to Israel through the prophets, God sends his own Son to his people Israel....”<sup>14</sup>

“But the tenants persisted in their violent opposition to the owner’s just claims.”<sup>15</sup> They **“took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him”** [21:39]. Here Jesus again predicts his own death as he had on several previous occasions.

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<sup>13</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 451.

<sup>14</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 621.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1992), 542.

## When Will These Things Be?

“He asks his listeners to tell him what the owner will then do....”<sup>16</sup>

***They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons” [21:41].*** At this point, they predicted their own destruction in AD 70.

And to this, Jesus adds, ***“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” [21:43].*** Jesus was speaking to the nation's religious leaders when he said ***the kingdom of God will be taken away from you*** [21:43]. He told them that they would no longer continue in their role as God's representatives of his kingdom on earth. It was a message they had heard before, and they knew what Jesus was saying, for Isaiah had made the same point.

*“And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.” I will lay it waste.... (Isaiah 5:5-6a, NKJV)*

***When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived***<sup>17</sup> ***[knew] that he was speaking about them [21:45].*** The Pharisees and Sadducees inadvertently identified themselves as the ones that would be put to death. Because they “knew” he was talking about taking *“the kingdom of God”* from them. As a result, they became increasingly convinced he must die. This was a challenge to the death—theirs or his.

They had heard all they needed to. This man was dangerous; he was threatening to kill them; they must, therefore, kill him first! But—they feared the crowds. They would have to be careful and attack when the masses were not present.

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<sup>16</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 542.

<sup>17</sup> *perceived* γινώσκω, “to come to an understanding as the result of ability to experience and learn.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 381.

## Matthew Chapter 22

### *Guests at a Royal Wedding Banquet (22:1–14)*

***“And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” (Matthew 22:1–7, NKJV)***

“The king’s son is clearly Messiah, not uncommonly represented as a bridegroom....”<sup>18</sup> But this King was not respected in this parable nor in real life. They did not care what the King wanted and instead ***seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them*** [22:6]. As in the previous parable about the tenants of the vineyard, judgment follows this rebellious and murderous behavior: ***he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers*** [22:7].

But there is an addition in this parable; it is ***and burned their city***. This was not a part of this or the previous story. It is added to warn his hearers that *Jerusalem* is also in danger of severe judgment for failing to respond to the King’s call.

### *Paying Taxes to Caesar (22:15–22)*

***“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”” (Matthew 22:17, NKJV)***

Their interest in obtaining Jesus’ opinion on paying taxes to Caesar is not out of respect for his view on this or any other subject; they are

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<sup>18</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 456.

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looking for an opportunity to accuse him before Pilate as a threat to Rome.

They ask him the politically charged question, ***Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*** With this question, they hope to diminish his standing before the people [if he says yes] or endanger his life with Roman [if he says no]. Either way, they can't lose. "This then depicts the dilemma in which the Pharisees hope to snare Jesus. To say that one should not ***pay taxes*** to the Romans would put him at odds with the civil authorities, while he would have lost favor with the people if he had advocated the payment of taxes to the Roman authorities."<sup>19</sup>

Jesus asks, ***"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"*** The image identifies the owner. The image on the coin was Caesar's; the coin belonged to Caesar, but the image on man is God; man belongs to God. Man is *allowed* to submit to foreign taxation; man is *required* to submit to God.

### ***The Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection (22:23–33)***

***"The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him..." (Matthew 22:23, NKJV)***

Little time passes before the second attempt to trap Jesus begins. The Sadducees ask, ***"Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother."*** (Matthew 22:24, NKJV)

Their story begins with the first marriage of this woman. The Sadducees then expand the situation to include seven brothers who, in turn, also marry her.

Then they ask, ***In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be*** [22:28]? To the Sadducees, this story was quite the conundrum [similar to paying taxes to Caesar]. It was, for that reason, a perfect question, and for them, it made the point that the whole notion of a resurrection was absurd.

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<sup>19</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 683.

Jesus answers, quoting God in the Old Testament, ***‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living*** [22:32].<sup>20</sup> The God of the patriarchs ***“is the God ... of the living,*** and in this context, the living must be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>21</sup> They are again confounded.

### ***The Great Commandment (22:34-40)***

***“Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”” (Matthew 22:35–36, NKJV)***

But they are not done in their efforts to trap Jesus. So next, we have a ***lawyer***, a specialist in Jewish law, who now approaches him.

To his question, Jesus answers, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”*** [22:37]. “Jesus was asked for but one commandment, but he goes further and adds ***“a second”*** that, he says, ***“is like it.”*** Wholehearted love for God means coming in some measure to see other people as God sees them and all people as the objects of God’s love. Therefore, anyone who truly loves God with all his being must and will love others....”<sup>22</sup>

Again Jesus leaves them without grounds to attack him.

### ***Whose Son Is the Christ (22:41–46)***

From Matthew 21:1 and on, Jesus presented Himself as Israel’s Messiah. They have rejected these claims. Now for the last time, Jesus will again address his standing as Israel’s messiah, asking, ***“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”*** [22:42].

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<sup>20</sup> Exodus 3:6, 15

<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 561.

<sup>22</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 563.

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At first, it appears that Jesus is merely asking an academic question about the human ancestry of the messiah. The answer is, he is **the son of David**. But there is more, and Jesus goes on: **How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord** [22:43]. Now it gets complicated.

In that culture, as an act of respect, it would be common for a son to call the father “lord” but not the other way around, not the father calling the son lord—which is what this passage is doing. So, this presents a dilemma; how or why would David call his offspring “Lord”? Jesus quotes Psalm 110 to make his point; note that David uses two words for God.

*“The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord [Adon]: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.””* (Psalm 110:1, ESV)

We note that “The “**right hand**” (Mt 22:44) is the position of highest honor and authority (cf. Ps 45:9; Matt 19:28).”<sup>23</sup> And because he sits in this position—right next to Yahweh, he is called Lord [Adon].

**If then David calls him Lord [Adon], how is he his son?** [22:45]. God recognizes that this one, this offspring of David, is both David’s son and his “Lord.” How is this possible? How can he be both son and Lord? At first, it would seem he could only be one or the other.

To this question, the Pharisees have no answer. Of course, the answer is that David’s son is also the Messiah, the Son of God—deity; therefore, David can address his son in this high and elevated fashion—Lord [Adon].

Why did Jesus ask this question: “**What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?**” [22:42]? With prophetic theater and with his healings and teachings, Jesus has been speaking to the leaders of the nation. He is the messiah, but they have not embraced him in this role. He is challenging them to think deeply

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<sup>23</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 467.

about what they have seen and heard about David's son. If David can call him Lord, *why can't they?*

## Matthew Chapter 23

### The Hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:1–12)

***“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples....”***  
**(Matthew 23:1, NKJV)**

Chapter 23 of the Book of Matthew is the most controversial chapter in Matthew. “The pitch of Jesus’ prophetism in this sermon is so high and its attack so bitter that some interpreters have difficulty believing that the historical Jesus ever said much of it...” So, from liberals, we commonly hear things like this: [It is] “the most un-Christian chapter” in Matthew ... “the unloveliest chapter in the Gospel,” ....” ... “In the Woe Speech of chapter 23, I stand as an interpreter next to the text in a state of shock, and I sometimes wish that this chapter did not stand in the Bible.”<sup>24</sup>

Statements like these are not uncommon in the commentaries. We read of Jesus telling us to love enemies in 5:42-48 and love neighbor in 22:37-40. How can we harmonize these teachings with the curses of Matthew 23 and the chapters that follow? The answer is found in the fact that we must not fail to remember that although Jesus loves sinners, he hates sin. Sin has consequences, and the great consequence of sin is righteous judgment; Matthew 23 is about righteous judgment.

### The Woes of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:13-31)

So, we come to Jesus’ famed woes on the scribes and Pharisees that make liberals so squeamish. The very thought of judgment on sin makes them dizzy with fear; perhaps Jesus will hold the godless accountable for their evil behavior. “Betty, says it ain’t so!”

We begin to close in on the Olivet Discourse with the Woes, creating a more immediate context for that Sermon.

#### ***Woe 1. The Door Shutters—23:13***

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 428.

**Matthew 23:13** “**But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.**”

**Woe**<sup>25</sup> is an exclamation of coming horror and sorrow. “The Old Testament prophets frequently cried woe against Israel’s sins. These oracles spoke with a blend of anger, grief, and alarm about the excruciating consequences that would come upon Israel due to her sin.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus is now using these woes in the very same way the prophets of old used them.

These woes are to the **scribes and Pharisees**, the primary religious leaders of Israel.

We learn that these leaders in Israel are **hypocrites**,<sup>27</sup> actors, or pretenders. “They are not leaders but misleaders.”<sup>28</sup> How did they do this? Jesus says **You shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces**. This is the very same practice of the theological liberals of our day. “...to hinder the proclamation of the good news is to shut the doors of the kingdom.”<sup>29</sup>

The scribes and Pharisees do not **enter** the kingdom because they refuse to recognize who Jesus is (22:41-46), the Messiah. They

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<sup>25</sup> woe οὐαί “...a state of intense hardship or distress—‘disaster, horror.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 299.

<sup>27</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1038.

<sup>28</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 3; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 285.

<sup>29</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 3; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 286.

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knew who he claimed to be and, "...they had *personally* rejected Jesus' teaching and claims...."<sup>30</sup>

"When the crowds begin to marvel at Jesus and suggest he may be the Messiah, the authorities do all they can to dissuade them (cf. 9:33–34, 11:19; 12:23–24; 21:15)."<sup>31</sup> They do not ***allow those who would enter to go in.***

### ***Woe 2. The Widow Devourers—23:14***

***Matthew 23:14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.***

The idea of ***pretense***<sup>32</sup> is to cloak one thing by the behavior of another thing. To devour widows' houses, they would cloak their greed with a semblance of spirituality with their prayers, and in this way, gain the trust of the widow. The elderly, and especially widows, are prominent targets for this greed, theft, and fraud.

They ***receive the greater damnation.*** Greater than what? Greater than punishment common to others who are guilty of the same sins but who are not "in the ministry." The preying on others "in the name of God" earns this greater damnation; it is the preying by praying that deserves the greater punishment.

### ***Woe 3, The Proselyte Seekers—23:15***

***Matthew 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte,***

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<sup>30</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 444.

<sup>31</sup> D. A. Carson, "*Matthew*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 478.

<sup>32</sup> *Pretense* πρόφασις "An outward show or appearance, a pretense or pretext put forth in order to cover one's real intent, that which is put forth as a cause or reason, an apparent reason...." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

***and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.***

“But being a **proselyte** of the Pharisees meant that the person was instructed in Judaism according to Pharisaic understanding of that faith.”<sup>33</sup> By adding **twice as much a child of hell as yourselves**, Jesus implies that the scribes and the Pharisees are also “sons of Gehenna.” “...the Pharisees’ teaching locked them into a theological frame that left no room for Jesus the Messiah and therefore no possibility of entering the messianic kingdom.”<sup>34</sup>

#### **Woe 4, The Oath Takers—23:16-22**

***Matthew 23:16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’***

“In a context in which oaths of all sorts had become *part of daily life* and in which there had been a huge proliferation of oath forms, there can be no doubt that for many, it had become quite unclear what exactly the use of an oath was meant to add. It made the matter more serious, but how much more serious? And was there a gradation with different oath forms? And, most important of all, what oaths had legal force?”<sup>35</sup> Jesus’ response is to bar all oaths *not* required by law—not all oaths.

***Matthew 23:22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.***

“People cannot escape the force of their oaths by wording them in such a way that, while they sound impressive, they lack the precise wording that makes them valid. This may serve in human courts, but

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<sup>33</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1992), 580.

<sup>34</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 479.

<sup>35</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 935.

## When Will These Things Be?

it is quite invalid where God himself is concerned. Of course, for followers of Jesus, it is not necessary to swear an oath at all, and he has already made it clear that they are expected to tell the truth at all times without the necessity of an oath to enforce truth (5:33–37).<sup>36</sup>

### **Woe 5, The Spice Tithers—23:23-24**

**Matthew 23:23** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*

In discussing the **tithe**, “They demand that tithes be paid of even the small flavoring herbs of which a family might grow a few....”<sup>37</sup>

Without demeaning tithing, Jesus makes it clear; it is **justice and mercy and faithfulness** that are the heart of the Christian faith. “All three refer to our relation to our fellow men. All three are both virtues of the heart and acts that grow out of these virtues.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Woe 6, The Cup Cleaners—23:25-26**

**Matthew 23:25** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.*

Jesus says **you clean the outside of the cup**, but then he follows that with a **woe**. This “woe contrasts the inward and the outward. The Pharisees were meticulous with outward things, things that people could notice, and that would impress on observers just how pious the Pharisees were.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1992), 582.

<sup>37</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 907-908.

<sup>38</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 908.

<sup>39</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1992), 583.

But, they were **full of**<sup>40</sup> or **stuffed** with **greed** and **self-indulgence**, which came *out of* them in their evil behaviors.

**Matthew 23:26** *You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.*

The Pharisees need to **clean the inside** of their own souls. “The Pharisees...debate about what must be cleansed for a cup to be clean, without seeing that they themselves need to become inwardly clean.”<sup>41</sup> “...but when a person is made clean in his innermost being this is necessarily reflected in that person’s outward actions.”<sup>42</sup> At that point, the **outside** and the **inside** are **clean**.

### **Woe 7, The Tomb Washers—23:27-28**

**Matthew 23:27** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.*

“Jesus is saying that the scribes and Pharisees are sources of uncleanness just as much as the whitewashed graves are.”<sup>43</sup> They are **full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness**, and all this notwithstanding the beauty of their “clerical robes.”

Few things would have angered them more.

### **Woe 8, The Tomb Builders—23:29-33**

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<sup>40</sup> of ἐκ “If something is in something else, then the separation from it is expressed with ἐκ, *out of*...” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 482.

<sup>42</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 584.

<sup>43</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 483.

**Matthew 23:29** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,*

Jesus said, **“you also outwardly appear righteous to others”** (v. 28), for they would **build and decorate** that they might achieve this goal. In 23:30, they claim that **‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’**

The Book of Hebrews gives a summary of their **shedding the blood of the prophets**.

*“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy....”* (Hebrews 11:35–38, ESV)

The Book of Acts adds to the list.

*“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,”* (Acts 7:52, ESV)

“...by erecting monuments, the religious leaders thought themselves morally and spiritually above their forebears who had persecuted the prophets whose monuments they were building (v. 29). They believed that they would not have joined their forebears in murdering the prophets....”<sup>44</sup> In fact, that is what they are about to do to Jesus and soon after that to his followers.

**Matthew 23:32** *Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.*

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<sup>44</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 483.

“...the sons, by their hostile rejection of Jesus and his disciples, are repeating what their fathers had done in rejecting the prophets. There is a certain bitter and ironic inevitability in this—hence, the sharp exhortation ... What the fathers began will be completed by their sons....”<sup>45</sup>

***Matthew 23:33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?***

John the Baptist had earlier identified them as a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7) in need of fleeing the wrath of God. Jesus continues this theme but now laments the lateness of their condition and its inevitable result, saying, ***how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?***

“In the NT, Gehenna is presented always as the final place of punishment into which the wicked are cast after the last judgment.”<sup>46</sup> The Pharisees are perfectly aware that Jesus has here sentenced them to ***hell***,<sup>47</sup> to eternal damnation, and they hate him for it.

### A Conclusion to Matthew 21-23

The last week of Jesus' life was one of confrontation; the week ended with Jesus threatening the nation's religious leaders with eternal damnation.

This near context of the Olivet Discourse is most important. The Premillennial Dispensationalist insist that the Olivet Discourse was not to or for the immediate crowd that Jesus was speaking to but was to an unnamed audience some two or three thousand years in the future. It is the context of the Olivet Discourse, chapters 21-23, that reveals that contention to be nonsense.

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<sup>45</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 672.

<sup>46</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000)..

<sup>47</sup> *hell* γέεννα “...a place of punishment for the dead—‘Gehenna, hell.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

## When Will These Things Be?

With the **Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)**, the conflict begins.

*“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, ....’ (Matthew 21:5, NKJV)*

Jesus was a king, but he was not wanted and would not be accepted.

**Jesus Cleanses the Temple (21:12–17)** to make a visual point; judgment is soon coming upon this *‘den of thieves.’*

**The Cursing of the Fig Tree (21:18-22)** is more prophetic theater—prophecy to be observed, not just listened to. Just as the fig tree is here withered and destroyed, so Israel will soon be destroyed and cast into the sea—the Gentile world.

As **John the Baptist’s Authority (21:23–27)** was rejected by Israel, so was Jesus’ authority. His miracles, teachings, and now his threat to destroy the Temple are dismissed, and he will soon be murdered because of them.

**The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28–32)** asks a question:

*“Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.” (Matthew 21:31, NKJV)*

The son that promised to work in the father’s field but did not—Israel, but the one that said no, later did go—the Gentiles. And with this story, these racial bigots have one more reason to hate Jesus.

To this prior insult, Jesus adds another, **The Parable of the Tenants (21:33–46)**. Here Jesus asks, “*when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?*” [21:40]. They answer to their own destruction, and Jesus responds.

*“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” Now when the chief*

*priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.” (Matthew 21:43–45, NKJV)*

The **Guests at a Royal Wedding Banquet (22:1–14)** answers the question as to what the King will do to those not willing to come to the wedding banquet:

*“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” (Matthew 22:7, NKJV)*

The religious leaders of Israel now attempt to get the Romans to kill Jesus for refusing to **Pay Taxes to Caesar (22:15–22)**. But in his thoughtful response, they fail to trap Jesus in political treason.

So, **The Sadducees Ask About the Resurrection (22:23–33)**.

Perhaps they can humiliate him before the people through theological entanglement and thereby diminish his authority in the eyes of the masses. But again, Jesus' response stifles them.

*“But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matthew 22:31–32, NKJV)*

Jesus exposes their liberal theology as a lie and once more enrages them.

But they are not done in their attempt to destroy him with a religious argument; certainly, a discussion on **The Great Commandment (22:34–40)** will open up avenues of conflict.

*“Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40, NKJV)*

## When Will These Things Be?

But again, with the simplicity of the truth, Jesus best those that would entangle him in religious arguments by their attempt to demean him in the eyes of the masses and thereby reduce his influence on them.

But now Jesus has a question of his own, ***Whose Son Is the Christ (22:41–46)?***

Why did Jesus ask this question? With prophetic theater, with healings and teachings, Jesus has been speaking to the leaders of the nation. These behaviors cry out: He is the messiah. But they refuse to embrace him in this role. He is challenging them to think deeply about what they have seen and heard about David's son. It is one of his many acts of compassion upon these evil religious leaders.

Now, with one last effort, Jesus pronounces ***The Woes of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:13–31)*** that will soon fall upon them in judgment for their religious duplicity.

These woes are coming upon ***The Door Shutterers—23:13, The Widow Devourers—23:14, The Proselyte Seekers—23:15, The Oath Takers—23:16–22, The Spice Tithers—23:23–24, The Cup Cleaners—23:25–26, The Tomb Washers—23:27–28, and upon The Tomb Builders—23:29–33.*** With these terms, Jesus identifies the hypocrisy and evil of his generation. And his conclusion?

*“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Matthew 23:31–36, NKJV)*

Notice upon whom these judgments of God will come—*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.* (Matthew

23:36). It is not to people living two or three thousand years in the distant future that Jesus was speaking. He was speaking to his own generation, and it is to these people that these judgments will fall; it is upon "this generation."

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**Part One – The Destruction of the Temple  
(23:34-24:35)**

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The Olivet Discourse,<sup>48</sup> commonly thought of as addressing Matthew 24-25, actually begins at Matthew 23:34 or even earlier.

**Persecution Is Coming – Matthew 23:34-36**

***Matthew 23:34 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,***

The material in 23:34-36 is not only a conclusion to the woes of chapter 23, but it is also an introduction to the content that follows in chapter 24. This overlapping of a conclusion that serves as an introduction is common in Biblical literature.

Notice that it is Jesus who is the “I” in ***I send you***. He says that he is the one who sends the ***prophets and wise men and scribes***—not God the Father! From comments like this, we see what Jesus’ opinion of himself was; he was God, and he acts like it. “The deity of Jesus peeks through this verse.”<sup>49</sup>

Jesus had prophesied of these events earlier. Notice the location of these persecutions; it is in the ***synagogue***. In the early years after Pentecost, Christians still worshiped in Jewish synagogues. Later, they either left or were thrown out.

This material is close to what Jesus preached in Matthew 10:5-42, which was also about the ministry of the apostles in the age between

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<sup>48</sup> Excellent studies in Matthew 24 and 25 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).

<sup>49</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 455.

Jesus' ascension to the Father and His judgment coming against Jerusalem 40 years later.

*"But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues." (Matthew 10:17, NKJV)*

Jesus had recently commented on this period of persecution in the chapters just before the Olivet Discourse.

*"When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them." (Matthew 21:34–36, ESV)*

*"...and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast." ' But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them." (Matthew 22:3–6, ESV)*

Saul, the Pharisee, who would one day be called Paul the Apostle, will fulfill some of these prophecies.

*"And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you." (Acts 22:19, ESV)*

*"And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." (Acts 26:11, ESV)*

Now called Paul, he will himself receive those same punishments for his Savior.

*"Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one." (2 Corinthians 11:24, ESV)*

## When Will These Things Be?

“Jews were always on the heels of the Christian missionaries. They never tired of pursuing them: at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45, 50), Iconium (14:2), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:5), Berea (17:13), Corinth (18:12; 20:3), Jerusalem (21:27; 23:12), and Caesarea (24:1–9).”<sup>50</sup> The first persecutor of the Church was Judaism.

***Matthew 23:35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.***

The coming judgment is to be **on you** or that current generation. That is an important point. It was not to be on a distant generation, one that has not even arrived yet. But as the passage says, **on you may come all....** This must be understood as an established point. Judgment was on first-century Israel.

Jesus identifies the scribes and Pharisees as the perpetrators saying to them, **whom you murdered.** “Their own reaction to Jesus’ emissaries will demonstrate solidarity with their ancestors, and God’s judgment in relation to that whole history will fall on these ‘sons of their fathers’.”<sup>51</sup>

This is valuable information on where to anchor this judgment.

### On This Generation – Matthew 23:36

***Matthew 23:36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.***

And, as if he has not made this clear already, he says it again—judgment is coming on **this generation.**

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<sup>50</sup> W. Hendriksen, & Kistemaker, S. J. Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Vol. 9, p. 837). (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001.)

<sup>51</sup> John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 947.

Our current verse, Matthew 23:36, and one to follow later in Matthew 24:34, provide us an *inclusio* of precisely what will come upon **this**<sup>52</sup> **generation**.<sup>53</sup>

The material between these two verses is what is coming upon the Jews of the first century.

*“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)*

There is both a chiasm<sup>54</sup> and an *inclusio*<sup>55</sup> in these two verses. The chiasm is illustrated in the order of **all these things**, found first in 23:36 but second in 24:34. And of course, **this generation** found second at 23:36 but first in 24:34. The chiasm and the *inclusio* make the time frame iron clad—first century Israel.

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<sup>52</sup> *this οὗτος* “Οὗτος designates that which the one speaking or writing sees before him or her. In contrast, (the much less frequent) ἐκεῖνος [that] points to that which is further away....” H. R. Balz, & Schneider, G., *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990)

<sup>53</sup> *generation 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.’” J. P. Louw, & Nida, E. A., *Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, New York: United Bible Societies, 1996)

<sup>54</sup> chiasm “A chiasm (also called a chiasmus) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. .... The term chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like our letter X. Chiastic pattern is also called “ring structure.””

<https://www.gotquestions.org/chiasm-chiastic.html>

<sup>55</sup> *inclusio* “In biblical studies, *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, although whether this material should consist of a word or a phrase, or whether greater amounts of text also qualify, and of what length the frames section should be, are matters of some debate. *Inclusio* is found in various sources, both antique and new. The purpose of an *inclusio* may be structural - to alert the reader to a particularly important theme....” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusio>

## The Chiasm

- A All these things  
    B This generation  
    B' This generation  
A' All these things

Of course, the inclusio includes the various verses between 23:36 and 24:34; they are thereby identified as a unit. The purpose of drawing the reader's attention to the chiasm and the inclusio is to help the reader understand the fixed nature of this material. To take pieces of these verses and apply them to actions thousands of years in the future is an act of literary suicide. It just cannot be done.

The events between these two verses will all happen in the years between Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

““This generation” is the generation of Israel now alive; the meaning of the term is so fixed that one cannot limit it to the scribes and Pharisees. Thus, the judgment is imminent, and it encompasses the entire present nation.”<sup>56</sup> “This generation,” which Jesus has already condemned repeatedly in 11:16; 12:39; 41–42; 45; 16:7; 17:17, is the generation which is about to reject the Messiah, God's final messenger. God's judgment on his rebellious people can no longer be delayed.”<sup>57</sup>

Take note that Dispensationalism cannot allow these things to happen in “this generation.” That would eliminate their “end of the world” view that the events in this chapter are still in our future. The solution? Insist that generation means race or that “this generation” actually means “that generation.” Neither of these reinterpretations is true, but it is all they've got.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 155.

<sup>57</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 882.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times*, (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999).

### Judgment Lamented – Matthew 23:37-39

**Matthew 23:37** *“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!”*

Jesus says, “**How often**”—not just once but with utmost persistence did Jesus seek to save his nation until it actually stilled his voice by death.”<sup>59</sup>

The phrase **as a hen gathers her brood under her wings** expresses Jesus’ desire to protect. “The hen’s wings were protective against dangers to her chicks; Jesus’ teaching had been protective against dangers to Israel. All Jesus’ warnings sought to rescue Israel...”<sup>60</sup>

“As Jesus contemplates what lies ahead of the people he came to save, it gives him no pleasure. He had “wanted” to gather them, not to condemn them.”<sup>61</sup> But, they **were not willing**

**Matthew 23:38** *See, your house is left to you desolate.*

“**Your house**,’ especially when spoken in the temple courtyard, naturally refers to the temple building which would be visible from there, and the more explicit prediction of 24:2 confirms this reference.”<sup>62</sup>

*“Jesus left **the temple** and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of **the temple**. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone*

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<sup>59</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel (p. 922). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28 (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 459.

<sup>61</sup> France, R. T. (2007), The Gospel of Matthew (p. 883). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>62</sup> France, R. T. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 883). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

## When Will These Things Be?

*upon another that will not be thrown down.”*” (Matthew 24:1–2, ESV)

Earlier Jesus called the temple “*my house*.”

*“He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”*”  
(Matthew 21:13, ESV)

“The abandoned temple is now “***your house***” instead of “God’s house.”<sup>63</sup> That which was under God’s protection is now under God’s judgment. “The immediate consequence is the destruction of the temple now deprived of its divine protection. Naturally, that is a divine signal for all Israel.”<sup>64</sup>

***desolate*** or ***uninhabited....*** Jesus’ verdict of “***desolate***” was concretized in history by the military desolation of Jerusalem in AD 70.... Ever since Jesus, whenever a house of God does not center in God’s Christ and his teaching, it is desolate.”<sup>65</sup>

***Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’***

***For....*** This word connects verses 38 and 39 together. Verses 38 speaks of the destruction of the Temple; verse 39 of those who will see Jesus again. Seeing Jesus again is conditioned on embracing him as savior and thereby saying, ‘***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***’ Tens of thousands of Jews did just that in the years after Jesus’ death.

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<sup>63</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 162.

<sup>64</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 162.

<sup>65</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook*, *Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 460.

“Jesus will leave the temple immediately, will never again turn to the entire nation, and will live only two more days.”<sup>66</sup> This would put these events on Wednesday and give these teachings powerful significance for future generations.

**Until, or again,**<sup>67</sup> or **from now on....** The Greek is a little difficult. “From now on” is repeated in 26:29 (RSV “again”) and 26:64 (RSV “hereafter”). The phrase is peculiar to Matthew’s Gospel, and it is evidently significant in his understanding of the last things.”<sup>68</sup>

Seeing Jesus again is dependent on saying words of salvation. So, from now on one would **see** Jesus again only when they say, **‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’** as words of repentance and faith.

*“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)

Notice that for Jesus, seeing **me** is the same thing as seeing **the Lord**. “...for Matthew, the presence of Jesus is the presence of God.”<sup>69</sup>

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!** This phrase comes from Psalm 118:26 and is quoted by the crowds in Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21:9. Indeed, this is the proper response to the coming of the messiah. But in 21:9, only a few of Jesus’ disciples responded in praise. This future-coming that Jesus addresses is his judgment coming in AD 70. This is to be distinguished from the final coming of Jesus at the end of time. The immediate context will clarify this.

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<sup>66</sup> Ulrich Luz, Matthew 21–28: A Commentary (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 162.

<sup>67</sup> ἄπ’ ἄρτι or “from now on.”

<sup>68</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 728.

<sup>69</sup> France, R. T., The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 884.

## When Will These Things Be?

When this judgment coming occurs, there are two possible responses of the people. One a delight at his coming; the other is terror.

There are some Jews who will suffer the judgment of God for their rejection of the messiah and only bow the knee with great reluctance:

*“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 on account of him. Even so. Amen.”*  
(Revelation 1:7, ESV)

“When the Son of Man comes in judgment, the people of Jerusalem (representing the Israel that has rejected Jesus) will “cry out in fear ... at the sight of his terrible Majesty, ‘truly He is the Son of God.’”<sup>70</sup>

“Following this final word of condemnation, the Messiah literally abandons the temple and prophesies its destruction (24:1–2).”<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

This passage, 23:34-39, explains, “first, that the people had been misled by false teachers and, second, that the rejection of Jesus and his messengers was simply the final instance in a long history of Israel’s mistreatment of God’s prophets. .... The passage portrays Israel as bereft of God’s healing presence.”<sup>72</sup>

We have now reviewed the background of the Olivet Discourse. From this, it is obvious what the Discourse addresses, the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple. When will this happen?

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<sup>70</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 164.

<sup>71</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 272.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 272.

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

When Will These Things Be?

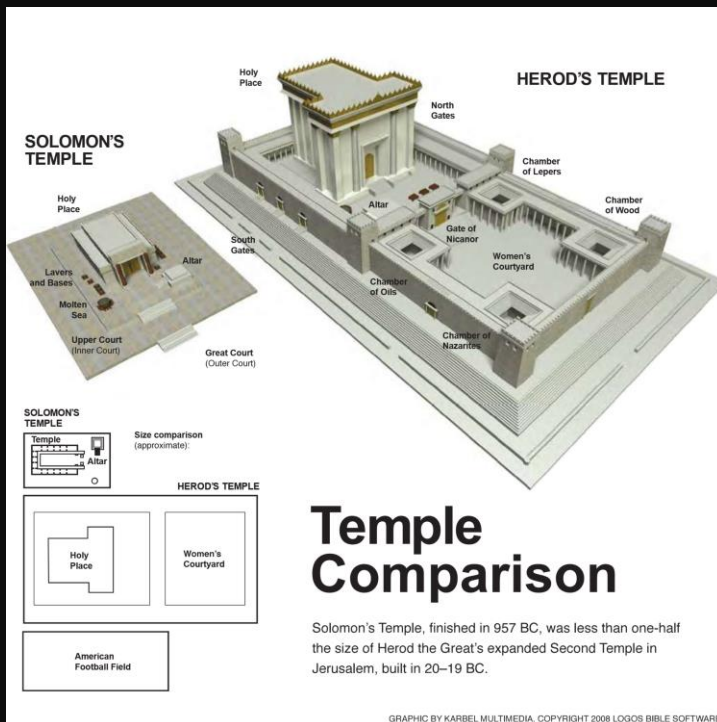
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***When Will These Things Be? – Matthew 24:1-24:14***

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**Not One Stone Upon Another – Matthew 24:1-24:3**

***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.***



When ***Jesus left the temple***, marked the end of the section on the material that began with *Jesus entering the temple* at 21:23.

*“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)*

He would never return to it again.

One is reminded of Ezekiel's record of the same event:

*"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 in our story in Matthew. The disciples are impressed beyond measure by this Temple and want **to point out to him** the magnificence of this structure.

*"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 buildings of the temple....*** The Temple was truly a magnificent building. "Work began in 20 BC, and while the main sanctuary was

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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.”<sup>73</sup>

Because of its size and grandeur, it took 84 years to build the Temple and was in full use after its completion for only 6 years before it was destroyed. “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).”<sup>74</sup> The building was a significant expense that “kept ten thousand workmen employed on it...”<sup>75</sup> 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:

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

Jerusalem and especially “*your house*,” that is, the temple, were of a scale that defied understanding. What does this mean “*left to you desolate*”? Surely, it is not what it appears to be!

***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.”***

From their vantage point on the Mount of Olives, they can clearly see the temple. Their eyes are fixed on its splendor. Jesus speaks:

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<sup>73</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 1246.

<sup>74</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 1246.

<sup>75</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 116.

***Truly, I say to you, there will not....*** Notice two things: First is Jesus' use of "truly" or amen. This is an emphatic assurance that this will happen. And then notice the "not" that follows the amen. In Greek, this is a double negative designed to state forcefully the *certainty* of the coming even.

***there will not be left here....*** Notice the word **here**; it is not the word **there**. Jesus is not addressing something that will happen in the distant future. He is speaking of what will happen right **here**. "Jesus is not describing what will happen to some future rebuilt temple. No mention is ever made in the New Testament about a rebuilt temple. Those who claim that the temple must be rebuilt during a future period of "great tribulation" cannot point to one verse in the New Testament that describes such a rebuilding program."<sup>76</sup>

***one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*** "...the entire discourse is provoked by his words about the destruction of the temple."<sup>77</sup> This announcement staggered their immigration; how can this be so?

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 exists the wailing wall 1600 feet long and 100 feet high. "The destruction of AD 70, while it utterly devastated the fabric of the temple, did not literally leave no stone on another."<sup>78</sup> 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?

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<sup>76</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 68.

<sup>77</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 959.

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**The Wailing Wall**

The surviving remnants, including the Wailing Wall, are of the foundation and outer court of the temple complex or Court of the Gentiles; *they are not the temple itself*—that has all been obliterated. “...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.”<sup>79</sup>

In fact, “The devastation of the temple by the Romans in AD 70 was so thorough that the precise location of the sanctuary is still unknown today.”<sup>80</sup> “For when the Romans had taken Jerusalem, Titus ordered his soldiers to dig up the foundations both of all the city and the temple.... As we read in the Jewish Talmud and in Maimonides, Turnus Rufus, or rather Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army at Jerusalem, did with a ploughshare tear up the foundation of the temple; and thereby signally fulfilled those words of Micah,

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<sup>79</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 888.

<sup>80</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Mt 24:2.

(3:12,) “*Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field.*”

Eusebius too affirms that it was ploughed up by the Romans, and he saw it lying in ruins.”<sup>81</sup>

We should note that this statement on the destruction of the Temple was not made in private to his disciples only but was made in public as he left the temple. Many others were leaving Jerusalem for the evening and are in the crowd while this conversation takes place.

Why were so many people leaving Jerusalem? 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 a place to stay in villages around the city. Countless others camped out in the fields.

A private conversation would come later in 24:3 where we read, “...*the disciples came to him privately.*...” In the discussion 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).”<sup>82</sup>

“*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.

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies, Which Have Remarkably Been Fulfilled, and at this Time are Fulfilling in the World* (London: J.F. Dove, 1754), 329.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>82</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 888.

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*“...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 a recent 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, Matthew 22:7 is precisely what Matthew 24 is discussing, destroying those murderers and burning their city.

### One Question or Three?

**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 and of the end of the age?”*

“The **Mount of Olives** ... gave a panoramic view over the temple whose destruction has just been pronounced.”<sup>83</sup>

As the crowds moved on, the **disciples came to him privately** and questioned him. This statement by Jesus sounded much like what many in Israel were teaching. “Many first-century Jews (especially the Essenes and the Pharisees) held to a premillennial eschatology (condemned by the patristic church as the heresy of chiliasm) which taught that the Messiah would come to set up an earthly kingdom; he would destroy the temple, and rule the nations with a rod of iron from Jerusalem. [Sound familiar?] Jesus’ disciples erroneously believed that Jesus was referring to his coming to rule in Jerusalem when he referred to the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24:2.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 894.

<sup>84</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 121.

Reading 24:3, it appears that they ask one question; it seems that they are convinced that the Temple's destruction means the coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

"... it must be observed that having believed from their infancy that the temple would stand till the end of time, and having this opinion deeply rooted in their minds, they did not suppose that, while the building of the world stood, the temple could fall to ruins. .... They associate the coming of Christ and the end of the world as things inseparable from each other...."<sup>85</sup>

But Jesus' answer breaks their question 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**.

So, Jesus is addressing his coming in judgment on Israel and his coming at the end of the world as two separate events.

### Daniel 12:7-8 and the Olivet Discourse

As Daniel nears the end of his prophecy, he is told what will happen in the days ahead.

*"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)

Then Daniel inquires again, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" (Daniel 12:6, NKJV), or how long before these things happen?

The passage goes on and says,

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<sup>85</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 117.

## When Will These Things Be?

*“Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?” (Daniel 12:7–8, NKJV)*

This is the angel's answer as to when the prophecies of Daniel will be completed. Notice that these comments are very similar to the disciples' question in Matthew 24.3, **“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”**

1) **...when will these things be....** The angel answers: **a time, times, and half a time** (Daniel 12:7), or three-and-a-half years. The Roman legions made up of troops from all the Gentile nations made war on Judea from April AD 67 to September/October of AD 70. This was 3 ½ years, and answers Daniel 12:7 exactly.

2) **...what will be the sign of your coming....** The angel answers: **when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished** (Daniel 12:7). That will be the sign of his coming in Judgment. This judgment was finished when Rome **completely shattered** Judea in A.D. 70. So, for Daniel, the sign was the complete destruction of Jerusalem.

3) **...and of the end of the age....** Or, as Daniel asks, **what shall be the end of these things?** (Daniel 12:8). Daniel was probably asking about the end of Israel, and that was in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. However, in addition to the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus will also address the end of the age or world, taking the question beyond the immediate context.

This similarity between Daniel and Matthew is not accidental; Daniel is prophesying about the same event, the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, as is Jesus in Matthew 24.

Going back to the first two questions, let's look at them again. ***Tell us, when will these things be....*** Let's look at the ***when*** question in more detail, these events are unpacked in Matthew 24:4-14. One of the first things we notice in this passage is Jesus' comment that *the end is not yet*.

*"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)*

This is a ***when*** comment.

The following question then addresses the ***what*** of this event.

***...what will be the sign of your coming....*** The ***sign*** question in verse 3 is dealt with in greater detail in Matthew 24:15-35. The sign question at first reading could refer to either the immediate subject, 1) the destruction of the temple or 2) the ultimate coming at the end of the world; Jesus will come in both cases. Which one is addressed here? Verse 34 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's destruction in the first century before that *generation* passed away—not at the end of the world.

### ***Parousía?*<sup>86</sup>** **Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39**

The word ***coming*** (*παρουσία*) in 24:3 should be addressed; it 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; they believe that in *every case*, it refers to Jesus' final coming at the end of the world. However, in and of itself, the word has no theological significance that demands this; it simply means "coming." It is the context that gives it an eschatological meaning—if there is one.

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<sup>86</sup> *coming παρουσία* "...to come to be present at a particular place—"to come, to arrive, to come to be present." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

## When Will These Things Be?

Matthew 24 is the only place in the Gospels where the word **parousía** is used, which we find in Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39.

1) Verses 24:3 and 27 refer to the judgment coming of Jesus to Israel and the Temple in A.D. 70. 2) Verses 24:37 and 39 address the coming of Jesus at the end of time. As can be seen, **parousía** is used for both of these different coming events. As a result, one should not think that parousia means Jesus' coming at the end of time only. In fact, it just as readily addresses his judgment coming in A.D. 70.

In Matthew, Jesus mentions his soon judgment coming on two occasions other than the Olivet Discourse. On these other occasions, 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 [έρχομαι, 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 [έρχομαι, ἐρχομαι] in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:27–28, ESV)*

We might note that "Jesus clearly states that He would come in some way before the last apostle died...."<sup>87</sup>

In Matthew 23:36 to Matthew 24:51, there are actually four Greek words used for "come." They are *έρχομαι* (*érchomai*), *προσέρχομαι* (*prosérchomai*), *ἤκων* (*hékō*), and *παρουσία* (*parousía*).

The first three words are verbs and have no noun variations. One distinctive of **parousía** (**παρουσία**) is that it is a noun with no verb

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<sup>87</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 72.

options. *This appears to be the sole reason for its use*; it provides information significantly different from the other “coming” words.

So, we should not assume that all “comings” by Jesus are his, 1) judgment coming against Jerusalem or, 2) are his last coming in time—the end of the world. They could be either; only the context can tell us. In fact, God has come many times in history 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.

### The End of What?

***Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end (συντέλεια, *suntéleia*) of the age? (Matthew 24:3b)***

In Greek, there are two words translated by one English word meaning “**end**.” One is *suntéleia* (συντέλεια)<sup>88</sup> found in Matthew 24:3, and the other is *télos* (τέλος)<sup>89</sup> found in Matthew 24:6, 13, and 14.

*Suntéleia* often means the end of the world, the end of time. *Télos* means the end of any period and possibly even the end of time. The use of these different words in these verses suggests different “ends” are spoken of in this passage—and that is confusing when you are only looking at the English word “**end**” used for both Greek words.

The point is Matthew uses this word **end** (συντέλεια, *suntéleia*) in 24:3 to refer to *the end of the world*, not to the end of the Jewish age which Jesus speaks of in 24:4-35.

*Suntéleia* (συντέλεια), **end**, is used six times in the New Testament, Matthew uses this word five times and *every* use of *suntéleia*

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<sup>88</sup> *suntéleia* (συντέλεια) “In the NT, used only in the expressions *suntéleia tou áiōnos*, “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).

<sup>89</sup> *télos* (τέλος) “An end, term, termination, completion. Particularly only in respect to time.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

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(συντέλεια) or **end** by him refers to *the end of the world*, followed by the last judgment. It is used here in 24:3 that way, and here means *the end of the world* as well. The word (τέλος) *télos* is used three times in the Olivet discourse, 24:6, 13, 14 and each time means the end of an age, possibly the end of the world, but not necessarily so.

The use of *suntéleia* (συντέλεια) in Matthew 13 illustrates a point:

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

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

The **end** (συντέλεια, suntéleia) has this same meaning in Matthew 28 as well.

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

Because of the use of this particular word for “**end**” (συντέλεια, suntéleia) in our current passage, we can see that the assumption of the disciples was that the end of the *world* would come when the Temple was destroyed. The disciples were asking Jesus about the end of the world, but he answered, telling them about the end of the Temple, not the end of the world. Jesus’ teachings on the end of the world do not come until *after* Matthew 24:35. All the material before that verse deals with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

**age**<sup>90</sup>.... The word **age** (αἰών *aíōn*) can refer to an end of a period or the end of the world. So, the Greek word for age does not help one way or the other, only the word **end**.

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<sup>90</sup> Age αἰών “a unit of time as a particular stage or period of history—‘age, era.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 647.

Jesus will answer their question in a way they didn't imagine. The Temple's destruction will not be the end of the *world* but will end the Jewish *age*. The other New Testament writers will understand this as well, for many are clearly looking for something big to happen *soon* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but that something is not the end of the world. In speaking of this near term or soon "end," they will *not* use "end" (συντέλεια *suntéleia*), meaning, 'end of the world,' but *télos* (τέλος) or *age*.

Paul uses the word in the very same way.

*"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends télos (τέλος) of the ages have come." (1 Corinthians 10:11, NKJV)*

The writer of Hebrews does the same.

*"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end [télos (τέλος)] of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Hebrews 9:26, NKJV)*

The conclusion of the matter is this: the Greek word for "end" (συντέλεια *suntéleia*) used by the disciples in 24:3 refers to the end of the world; this is their question, but a question not addressed by Jesus until verses 24:36 to 25:46. The material before 24:36 is addressing the end of the Jewish age. The disciples associated Jesus' judgment coming with the end of the world; it was not. As R.C. Sproul said, "In the Olivet Discourse, when Jesus spoke about "the end of the age," I am convinced that He wasn't talking about the end of the world, but about the end of the Jewish age."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 15.

### False Messiahs and Prophets - Matthew 24:4-5

**Matthew 24:3–5** *“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?’”*<sup>4</sup> **And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you.** <sup>5</sup> **For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.**

It appears that the apostles ask one question, addressing the destruction of the Temple. However, as they did this, they associated this destruction of the Temple with the coming of Jesus and the end of the world. They were partially correct.

Jesus does come in a Judgment coming to destroy the Temple, which is the end of the Jewish age or world. But not the end of the whole world. When answering them, he breaks their question down into three answers.

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

Now, at this point, Jesus begins to address in detail the **when** question: **when will these things be** (24:3)? “He didn’t want them to be deceived that the end had already come when it hadn’t, so He gave them a list of what we call “signs of the times.” These were signs that had to happen before the end would come.”<sup>92</sup> Now all Christians believe that these signs must occur before the “end.” But, the end of what? Either 1) the end of the Jewish age, which occurred in A.D. 70, or 2) the end of the world, which is yet in our future. Which of these two do these verses address?

Today, most Christians believe that these signs will occur right before the end of the world, which is some time yet in our future. “But if we look carefully at this passage, we learn that Jesus is not talking about the signs that trigger the end of time, but the signs that

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<sup>92</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 16.

had to take place before the destruction of Jerusalem.”<sup>93</sup> Now the Temple’s destruction was in A.D. 70; this is a historical fact, so that puts the time question to rest, right? Hm, no. Those who believe the Temple must first be destroyed before Jesus comes again in our future simply respond, “it will be rebuilt.” Now, is there a problem with this? Yes, it is simply this: the Temple’s rebuilding is never mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Nowhere at all! “Certainly, Jesus’ disciples would not be thinking of a *rebuilt temple* when they were looking at an existing temple that Jesus said would be destroyed!”<sup>94</sup>

Now the thing about making a statement about the rebuilding of the Temple and another destruction of the Temple in the future is this: how can you prove them wrong? Apparently, just because the Bible never mentions this is no impediment to them. It will be so because they say it will be so. Case closed. But that will not do. We must look at the context of this passage and see if the Temple’s destruction is predicted as a remote one in the distant future or to a destruction in the near future.

The first sign Jesus puts forth deals with the coming of false Messiahs and Prophets before this event. Were there any false Messiahs and Prophets in the first century?

**See that no one leads you astray.** Jesus’ warning was directed at those to whom he was speaking. The “**you**” in this phrase is his current audience, not an audience millennia in the future. I don’t think any in that audience looked at one another and said, “Believers thousands of years from now will need to look out for these guys.” Jesus was speaking to “**you**.” He expected them to listen and to look out for these false Messiahs and Prophets.

**...leads you astray....** In fact, were people led astray by false Messiahs and Prophets?

“In the first-century era, the Jews fervently anticipate a conquering Messiah. Jesus warns his disciples not to be caught up in such a

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<sup>93</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 16.

<sup>94</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 52.

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Zionistic frenzy.”<sup>95</sup> If they were caught up in political intrigue and religious hysteria, then they would be led **astray**. Jesus came to establish no such movement. But, this was the prevailing view in first-century Israel. As a result, it would not be hard for many to accept this false view and be led **astray** by the promises of false Messiahs and prophets in the years following his resurrection. Especially so since they had just killed the Lord of Glory.

*“Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11–12, ESV)*

So, Jesus speaks to the problem, but he does so to “his people.” Not the world.

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

**many**<sup>96</sup>.... “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.”<sup>97</sup>

**I am the Christ....** This is what Israel hoped to hear, and this hope allows many charlatans to gather a following. Having rejected the Author of life (Acts 3:15), they are ripe for the deceptions of the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

In fact, did many false prophets come and deceive many?

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<sup>95</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times*, (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999, 46.

<sup>96</sup> *many* πολὺς “...a relatively large quantity of objects or events—‘many, a great deal of, a great number of.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996).

<sup>97</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 961.

*“For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.” (Acts 5:36–37, NKJV)*

Josephus (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.97) speaks of the 400 followers of Theudas and of “the majority of the crowd” or “the huge crowd”) that followed him. In Acts 21:38, we learn that there were 4,000 *sicarii* who followed “the Egyptian.” “Given the “zealot” ideology which derived from the revolt of Judas ... and which eventually resulted in the revolt of AD 66, the popularity of such “messianic” figures is not surprising.”<sup>98</sup>

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.””<sup>99</sup>

Another prophet mentioned by Josephus was from Samaria, “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 Gerizim, 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

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<sup>98</sup> 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.

<sup>99</sup> P. Schaff & D. S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Vol. 1, p. 394), (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 394.

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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.”<sup>100</sup>

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....”<sup>101</sup>

**...they will lead many astray....** And again, Josephus says of one such person: “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....”<sup>102</sup>

There were so many impostors preying on the gullible that under the procuratorship of Felix, “many of them were apprehended and killed every day. They seduced great numbers of the people still expecting the Messiah; and well, therefore, might our Saviour caution his disciples against them.”<sup>103</sup>

John, one of the disciples that heard this message by Jesus, said during his lifetime:

*“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.*

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<sup>100</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 482.

<sup>101</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 171.

<sup>102</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 536.

<sup>103</sup> Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 74.

*Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18, ESV)*

This statement places the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in the first century—the century in which John wrote these words and calls it “*the last hour*” and not some still distant point in our future.

### **Wars and Rumors of Wars – Matthew 24:6**

But before we go further in the text, let’s ask the question, “How can these things be signs? When are there not wars and rumors of wars? When are there not earthquakes? When are there not famines? There have also always been false prophets and false christs. If these things have always been with us, in what sense could they be signs?”<sup>104</sup>

The answer has to be ‘when at a time these things are not common to history.’ That is not today for the Futurists almost daily quote the newspapers of events like these that are a part of our age. Was there a time in the distant past when these things were not common? There was. Let’s go on with our text to find out when. But note, Jesus is not here giving His first-century disciples warnings about what would happen in the twenty-first century. He was talking to them about “this generation.” That statement fixes the context.

***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.***

This verse and those verses following are quoted by every dispensational pre-millennialist that seeks to stir up his crowd to the hoped-for coming of Jesus in our near future. Will this verse bear the weight of that near-term disaster that is almost daily laid to its account in our generation?

***you will hear....*** It is essential to keep in mind the context of this verse; it is not New York City or Los Angeles in the twenty-first

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<sup>104</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 17.

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century that Jesus is referencing. Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples in the first century on the Mount of Olives while looking at Jerusalem and its Temple. He says ***you will hear***; that is our context, not what you and I may hear *today*.

***wars and rumors of wars....*** Hardly a month goes by in which a Futurist<sup>105</sup> does not point to the “*wars and rumors of wars*” found in our current world as proof that “the Lord is coming soon.” The problem with this is that ***wars and rumors of wars*** have been common since the fall of man. The very fact of its commonality would seem to disqualify this “sign” from having any practical value as an indicator of anything. Under those circumstances, giving such a sign would not even be a rational act. It simply would never indicate anything unique that was about to happen.

The only way this phrase could have any use as an indicator or sign of Jesus coming and of the end of the world would be its fulfillment in a period in which ***wars and rumors of wars*** were rather uncommon. Was there ever such a time? There was, it was in the first century A.D and was called the Pax Romana or Peace of Rome.

The “Pax Romana...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. ... Its span was approximately 206 years (27 BC to 180 AD).”<sup>106</sup> In other words, the period encompassed the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse.

Although there were some wars during this period, they were less than the periods before and after. One area that saw a *major violation* of this peace was Israel in A.D. 60 to A.D. 70. But because peace was otherwise the shared experience of most of the empire at

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<sup>105</sup> “The Futurists see in this book (of Revelation) 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.” Ralph E. Bass, Jr., *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation*, (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 11-12.

<sup>106</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax\\_romana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_romana)

this time, this era was a unique period in human history in which wars and rumors of wars could genuinely be a sign of something.

**but the end is not yet.** The material before 24:35 deals with the question of “when” the Temple will be destroyed. So, the thrust of 24:2 was the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70; this would be the “**end**” that Jesus is referencing in verse 6. The disciples must not let the warnings in verses 5 and 6 above cause them to think that this end is imminent; it is soon but not immediately so.

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)*

This passage (24:4-8) is the most popular one used by modern dispensationalists; it actually proves to be useless to their cause. Its ability to be used as a viable sign demands that just before this point, there must be a period in which **wars and rumors of wars** are relatively uncommon. To them, the passage is vital proof of their eschatology, and all because of the **wars and rumors of wars** that are herein mentioned. In fact, those very statements would establish the exact circumstances in which the verses would be of no value as an indicator.

To continue with this point—

### **Famines, Pestilences and Earthquakes – Matthew 24:7-8**

***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 to the peace of the era, the period between A.D. 60 and A.D. 70.

“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

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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.”<sup>107</sup>

But because this period was otherwise a generally peaceful one, it was truly a sign of the times.

**famines....** Like war, until the industrial revolution, famines were frequent 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 famine as a “sign” of something 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.<sup>108</sup> Because that was the case, famines in this area during this period were a sign.

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

*“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)*

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

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<sup>107</sup> Ralph E. Bass, Jr., *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation*, (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 359-360.

<sup>108</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_famines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_famines)

come upon us, that one-tenth deal [of wheat] was sold for four drachmae....”<sup>109</sup>

There was a gentile named Queen Helena from an area east of the Tigris who became a Jew and who did much to relieve this 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....”<sup>110</sup>

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 “...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 than wheat.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 101.

<sup>110</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 528.

<sup>111</sup> Ralph E. Bass, Jr., *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation*, (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 179.

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Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid, A.D. 1078, says this about this time, “Now some have wished to place the fulfillment of these things not only at the future consummation of all things but at the time also of the taking of Jerusalem. For when the Author of peace was killed, then justly arose among the Jews wars and sedition, but from wars proceed pestilence and famine, the former indeed produced by the air infected with dead bodies, the latter through the lands remaining uncultivated.”<sup>112</sup>

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....** When studying earthquakes, a problem we face is the need for some kind of ancient frequency record to reference; we don't have one. Of course, earthquakes were frequent in the Mediterranean world. 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.”<sup>113</sup>

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,

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Luke* (ed. John Henry Newman; vol. 3; Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 677.

<sup>113</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 903-904.

and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming.”<sup>114</sup>

Considering the way Jesus addresses these earthquakes, seems reasonable to suggest that they were somewhat uncommon for this period. But now, as here predicted by Jesus, they become more frequent again. And as a result, they became a sign.

***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).

“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.”<sup>115</sup>

Although these signs were the beginning of the end of the age, it was not a beginning that has lasted over 2000 years. Two thousand years of birth pains do not fit the definition of a ***beginning***.

### **Delivered up to Tribulations – Matthew 24:9**

***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.***

Verses 9 and 10 remind us of a prior sermon Jesus preached in Mathew 10:5-15 of persecution by the Jews and then in Matthew 10:16-42 of persecution by Gentiles. These were instructions on ministry during the years from Jesus’ accession to the Father until His coming in judgment against Israel in A.D. 67-70. Much of what Jesus said there flesh out in greater detail what we read here.

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<sup>114</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 678.

<sup>115</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 904.

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Jesus is in Matthew 24:3 having a private conversation with his disciples; this warning of tribulation and death is directed to the Twelve. Their ministry will reach “all nations during their lifetime,” and they will be hated and murdered in each case. The only known exception to this was John.

Just a few minutes earlier, Jesus addressed this very topic.

*“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....*** Jesus spoke of these events in Matthew 10.

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

***to tribulation....***

*“... 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)

***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 disciples’ ministry was in some cases to distant lands (Thomas to India), the main thrust to “*all nations*” would be to those from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the rest of the Roman Empire.

*“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)

**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 leading causes of popular resentment against Christians.”<sup>116</sup>

*“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)

## Rome and the Emperor Nero

In A.D. 64, Emperor Nero, the little horn of Daniel 7:7-8, enters the picture.

[Rome] *“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.*

[Nero] *I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.”* (Daniel 7:7–8, ESV)

In the writings of the period, Nero’s persecutions are described.

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<sup>116</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 905.

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“Touching the manner in which the Christians were tortured and killed at the time of Nero, A. Mellinus gives the following account from Tacitus and other Roman writers: namely, that four extremely cruel and unnatural kinds of torture were employed against the Christians.

Firstly, they dressed them in the skins of tame and wild beasts, that they might be torn to pieces by dogs or other wild animals.

Secondly, that they, according to the example of their Saviour, were fastened alive on crosses, and that in many different ways.

Thirdly, that the innocent Christians were burned and smoked by the Romans, with torches

Fourthly, that these miserable, accused Christian martyrs were used as candles, torches, or lanterns to see by them at night.

Of those who were burned, some were tied or nailed to stakes, and held still by a hook driven through the throat, so that they could not move the head when the pitch, wax, tallow, and other inflammable substances were poured boiling over their heads, and set on fire, so that all the unctious<sup>117</sup> matter of the human body flowing down made long, wide furrows in the sand of the theatre. And thus human beings were lighted as torches and burned as lights for the wicked Romans at night.

Juvenal and Martial, both Roman poets and Tertullian, state this in a different manner, namely, that the Romans wrapped them in a painful or burning mantle, which they wound around their hands and feet in order to melt the very marrow in their bones.

Furthermore, it is stated by A. Mellinus (from the aforementioned authors), concerning those mantles, that

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<sup>117</sup> “Of the nature of or resembling an unguent or ointment; greasy; oily; fat; soapy.” <https://www.wordnik.com/words/unctuous>

they were made of paper or linen and, having been thickly coated with oil, pitch, wax, rosin, tallow, and sulphur, were wrapped around their whole body, and then set on fire.

These proceedings, according to the testimony of Tacitus, although it had the appearance that the Christians were punished as malefactors who had deserved the extremest penalty, nevertheless moved the people to compassion; for they understood well enough that the Christians were not exterminated for the good of the common weal, but simply to gratify the cruelty of one man, Nero.”<sup>118</sup>

These stories illustrate how the Church suffered during the first century, right before the destruction of Jerusalem, fulfilling 24:9.

### **Betray and Hate One Another – Matthew 24:10**

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

***many will fall away....*** In the coming years, the Apostle John will expand the many that fell away.

*“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)*

We also have Paul’s comments in 2 Timothy. He was also forsaken.

*“...all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.” (2 Timothy 1:15, NKJV)*

*“...for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world....” (2 Timothy 4:10, NKJV)*

*“At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me.” (2 Timothy 4:16, NKJV)*

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<sup>118</sup> <http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/martyrs011.htm>

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This is an ugly picture of Christianity as early as Paul's own life.

**...and will betray one another....** By the mid AD '60s, during the persecution by Nero, "Both Pliny and Tacitus mention Christians convicted on the testimony of others...."<sup>119</sup> He notes, "First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, a large number of others were condemned."<sup>120</sup>

This persecution lasted from around November A.D. 64 to Nero's death on June 8, A.D. 68. This was prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 67-70 and, therefore, particularly significant to our passage here.

### **False Prophets will Deceive Many – Matthew 24:11**

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

Earlier in chapter 24:4-5, we read of false christ, which appears to be a warning to the Jewish community. Here in chapter 24:11, "the focus appears to be on impostors within the disciple community [the Church] rather than the messianic claimants predicted in vv. 4–5."<sup>121</sup> These particular **false prophets** would be those active in the Gentile church. Earlier, Jesus warned of both in the Sermon on the Mount.

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

Peter adds:

*"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who*

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<sup>119</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 394.

<sup>120</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.

<sup>121</sup> 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.

*bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” (2 Peter 2:1, ESV)*

And Paul says as well:

*“But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3, ESV)*

## Preterism

There was false teaching in the early church that is exactly like one in the current Church, which teaches that all Bible prophecies are fulfilled and have been so since A.D. 70. They say that there is no future resurrection. They call themselves “complete” or “full Preterists.” They are modern-day Hymenaeus; a better description would be unorthodox Preterists.

*“But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.” (2 Timothy 2:16–18, ESV)*

This statement by Jesus and others on false prophets was fulfilled in the first century.

## Lawlessness – Love Growing Cold – Matthew 24:12

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

There are at least three ways **lawlessness** can be understood. One would be the lawlessness of culture due to a weakening and failing of the Roman government. After Nero’s death, Rome had three Emperors in one year, each assassinated. It was a lawless time. A second would be the lawlessness of Israel because of the rise of the Zealots who attacked the civil government and Temple worship. Chaos reigned in Israel during this period. Three would be lawlessness in the Church perhaps by hearts grown cold to the gospel. This last one may be the most likely.

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**...increased....** To increase lawlessness is to increase disobedience to the word of God. “Wickedness” (ἀνομία) [lawlessness] and “love” (ἀγάπη) cannot coexist; where one proliferates, the other must correspondingly disappear.”<sup>122</sup>

**...many....** The word “many” is key to the verses from verse 5 to verse 12. “Many” is found 6 times in this passage.

*“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)

**...grow cold....** “It is the loss of love that makes the betrayal of v. 10 possible.”<sup>123</sup>

*“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)

Like all these statements, these have happened on and off over the last 2000 years. They initially occurred in the first century.

### He Who Endures to the End – Matthew 24:13

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

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<sup>122</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 876.

<sup>123</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 966.

**...endures....** Endures what? To some degree, it is the one who endures the external terrors of a fallen world in verses 4-8 that Jesus here speaks. However, it appears that the internal threats of lawlessness in the Church in verses 9-14 are the main point; these are the ones that are saved.

Jesus addresses the very same subject in Matthew 10, enduring persecutions before the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

*“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (Matthew 10:22–23, NKJV)*

**...the end<sup>124</sup>....** The material between 24:4 and 24:14 encompasses 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)*

At 24:6, we read “not yet.” But soon, in 24:14, we will read that “*the end will come.*” It is moving closer.

**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 seems to mean saved from hell.

Some who have identified themselves with the disciples and the Church may in some ways fail. But these will lose their salvation, for their behavior will prove they were never saved.

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<sup>124</sup> *the 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.

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*“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. As quoted earlier:

*“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 interesting:

*“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 in Revelation? It does not appear that this behavior compares with the others. Doesn’t cowardly mean that they were fearful, and aren’t we all afraid? This is a fear that is a worse sin than the others on the list. It is the fear of the apostate who, because of his cowardly fear, denies Christ. Matthew 24:13 “**But he who endures to the end shall be saved**” addresses the courage of believers. Revelation 21:8 addresses the cowardly behavior of the betrayers and haters of the Church that they once embraced. They do not endure; they are lost, not saved. They follow in the footsteps of Judas.

Do not be confused by this passage, thinking that a Christian must live a perfect or near-perfect lifestyle to be saved. 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)*

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.*” 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 were prepared to do. “Come back to your family, friends, and your ancient Jewish faith; all will be forgiven; all will be right again.” That was a strong appeal.

Those that endure 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.

### **This Gospel is Preached to the Nations – Matthew 24:14**

***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....*** Don’t miss the word “gospel” or the good news of Jesus’ birth, sinless life, death, burial, resurrection, and accession to the Father in this phrase. This is the message that is to be proclaimed throughout ***the whole world***.

***the whole world***<sup>125</sup>.... Let’s consider some definitions for ***world***:

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

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<sup>125</sup> *world* οἰκουμένη “This word, having the sense of a noun, denotes the “inhabited world” and then comes into use for the Roman empire.” Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 679.

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② the world as an administrative unit, the Roman Empire....”<sup>126</sup>

Is not Jesus here talking about our modern missionary movement bringing the Gospel to every tribe and nation on the inhabited earth? No, he is not. He is talking about the world of the Roman Empire. It is the same world mentioned in Luke 2.

*“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 on the Mount of Olives, would you be thinking about the need for new missions to South America or Japan? You would not! Which world was to be taxed? South America? China? Australia? No, it was the Roman Empire. Jesus was speaking of the world of the Apostles, 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,*

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<sup>126</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 699.

*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)*

As Eusebius said, “The Gospel, then, in a short time was preached in the whole world [Col. 1:6, 23], for a witness to the heathen, and Barbarians and Greeks alike possessed the writings about Jesus in their ancestral script and language.”<sup>127</sup>

And take note of Clement of Rome’s comments about the life and death of the Apostle Paul. “After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.”<sup>128</sup>

*“Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.” (Romans 15:28, NKJV)*

How far did the gospel go? One writer says, “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 organized attempt to convert the British.”<sup>129</sup>

“...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, 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

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<sup>127</sup> Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 1:157–158 (137). Quoted by Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2006), 21.

<sup>128</sup> Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2006), 33.

<sup>129</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/uk\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/history/uk_1.shtml)

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century shows that the Britannic Isles—not Rome or Spain—represent the extremity of the west.”<sup>130</sup>

One early commentator on this passage from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century says, “For the Gospel will be preached to all the nations as a witness, that is, as a reproof, a condemnation of those who do not believe, and then the end will come, not of the world, but of Jerusalem.”<sup>131</sup>

Simply put, “*this gospel of the kingdom*” had been “*proclaimed throughout the whole world...to all nations*” by AD 70. That is the *whole world* and *all the nations* that Jesus is here addressing.

***then the end (télōs)***<sup>132</sup> ***will come....*** This refers to the end of the Jewish age and not the end of the world, the last day in human history.

As said earlier, the English word “**end**” (συντέλεια *suntéleia*) as in Matthew 24:3, is not to be confused with the word “end (*telos*, τέλος)” in 24:6, 13, 14—our passage here. The use of different words in these verses makes the point that different “ends” are spoken of. The word used in 24:14, (*telos*, τέλος) addresses the end of the Jewish age in A.D. 70, whereas (συντέλεια *suntéleia*), not used here, addresses the end of the world.

Again, here we are told that after the signs found in verses 24:7 through 24:14, the end, *télōs*, τέλος, will come. In context, the end that will come is the destruction of the Temple and the nation Israel, not the end, *suntéleia*, (συντέλεια *suntéleia*), of the world. One could hardly describe the confusion this phrase has caused by those who miss this point—Dispensational Premillennialists.

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<sup>130</sup> <https://www.tomorrowworld.org/magazines/2008/march-april/early-christianity-and-europes-western-isles>

<sup>131</sup> Theophylact, *Commentary on Matthew*. On Matthew 24:14. *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew* (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 1992), 206.

<sup>132</sup> *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.

Let us remember our context; it begins with Matthew 23:36 and goes through 24:34-35.

*"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 material, 24:14, fits within this section addressing "the end," τέλος, of Israel. So, what we are studying sees its fulfillment in "*this generation*," the one he was then addressing—not thousands of years in the distant future!

As indicated, the material in 24:4 through 24:34-35 breaks down into two sections; the *when* and the *what* of his 1<sup>st</sup> century coming. Matthew 24:4-14 dealt with the question, "*Tell us, when will these things be?*" The next section, 24:15-24:35, deals with the question, "*what will be the sign of your coming...?*" (Matthew 24:3, ESV).

And the following question, after the *when* and *what* material, deals with "*and of the end of the age*" or world. It is a separate answer by Jesus, which 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)

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.

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***What Will Be the Sign – Matthew 24:15 – 24:35***

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**The Abomination of Desolation – Matthew 24:15**

***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),***

Liberals tell us that many things written in Daniel were placed there by several unknown authors. But Jesus is clear; this was “***spoken through Daniel the prophet.***” In saying this, Jesus is eliminating the liberal argument that much in Daniel was written by other authors. The author was Daniel; he spoke it.

**see**<sup>133</sup>.... There is now a visible sign; there is something to see. What will they see? That is not entirely clear, but Luke has something to add that might be the answer.

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

Near is not the same thing as here, but it is certainly close.

**abomination**.... Let’s take a minute to look into this word. It means:

- “(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....”<sup>134</sup>

**desolation**.... Our next word needs some attention as well. Desolation addresses: “The act, or the process of making desolate (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14) in the phrase “*the abomination of*

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<sup>133</sup> see εἶδον “...to see, sight, seeing.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>134</sup> *abomination* βδέλυγμα “...to emit a foul odor, to turn away through loathing or disgust, abhor.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

*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.”<sup>135</sup> R.T. France calls it the “devastating pollution.”

***the abomination of desolation....*** Now we can combine these words and get a fuller idea of what they mean. It is: “... (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.’”<sup>136</sup>

“Although it appears that Matthew 24:15 is an allusion to four verses in Daniel, the only ones that apply to Jesus’ prophecy as an event yet to come are **Daniel 9:27 and 12:11**. The other two references, Daniel 8:13 and 11:31, are not referring to the Romans, but to the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV, Epiphanes who sacrificed a pig on the altar of the Temple at Jerusalem in 167 BC.”<sup>137</sup> The two events should not be confused, although the first abomination by Antiochus IV Epiphanes is symbolic of the second by Vespasian and his son Titus.

These particular prophecies in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 find their specific fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

*“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to  
sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes  
desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured  
out on the desolate.”* (Daniel 9:27, NKJV)

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<sup>135</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>136</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>137</sup> Jay Rogers, In the Days of These Kings, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 240-241.

## When Will These Things Be?

*“And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.” (Daniel 12:11, NKJV)*

“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.”<sup>138</sup>

From this, we can see that “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.”<sup>139</sup> The timing and content of this story are crucial, for it gave time for the Christian community to act by abandoning the city.

This Abomination of Desolation spoken of here is not an end-of-the-world event. Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, A.D. 396, said this, “and thus has made plain what might otherwise have been doubtful, namely, that what was said of the abomination of desolation belonged not to the end of the world, but the taking of Jerusalem.”<sup>140</sup> This understanding of these events was an ancient truth that our modern age has not yet come to understand.

***standing in the holy place....*** The holy place might reference the Temple on the one hand or the holy city itself on the other. We cannot be sure which.

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<sup>138</sup> *desolation ἐρήμωσις*, Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>139</sup> 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.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Luke* (ed. John Henry Newman; vol. 3; Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 682.

***let the reader understand....*** Understand what? “Obviously, from the context, we must understand this passage of Daniel. And unless we have the correct interpretation of Daniel, we will not be able to understand the Mount Olivet Discourse.”<sup>141</sup> Jesus asks his audience to understand the original statement in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11, which means understanding what it meant to that original audience. The Olivet Discourse picks up on Daniel and gives greater detail to that book.

### **Flee to the Mountains – Matthew 24:16**

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

***flee to the mountains....*** It is not at all clear how dispensationalists can apply this verse to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most people in the world don’t live near mountains. But if they did it would be irrelevant for Jesus was very specific that it was Jerusalem and the Temple that was the object of his prophecy. The explanation of fleeing to mountains can only be understood in that geographic context.

So we read: when the reader sees these following indicators, he is to act quickly, for now, the end is upon him. In verse 24:6, it was “*the end is not yet.*” In verse 24:8, it is “*All these are the beginning of sorrows.*” In verse 24:14, it was “*then the end will come.*” Now in 24:16, it is “*flee to the mountains.*” Notice the building tension over the months and years.

In the first century, when the Roman armies approached Jerusalem, the Church abandoned the city, heading north by the mountain road. They did so because they believed this prophecy was for their benefit in that era. “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.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 18.

<sup>142</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 501.

## When Will These Things Be?

Eusebius, Archbishop of Cæsarea, A.D. 315, says of this incident, “Now our Lord, foreseeing that there would be a famine in the city, warned His disciples in the siege that was coming, not to betake themselves to the city as a place of refuge, and under God’s protection, but rather to depart from thence, and flee to the mountains.”<sup>143</sup>

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 Rome began this war on Israel and the point at which Jerusalem was destroyed by 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.”<sup>144</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Luke can help as he appears to clear it up, saying:

*“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her.” (Luke 21:20–21, NKJV)*

For Luke, the armies surrounding the city demonstrate that destruction was upon them. So, although we don’t know the specific moment the Church fled Jerusalem, early Church history tells us they did so.

They are not to flee to the arid wilderness (south) (24:26), and they are certainly to stay off the roads (east and west) that are watched by the Romans. Instead, they are to take mountain paths from the

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<sup>143</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Luke* (ed. John Henry Newman; vol. 3; Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 681.

<sup>144</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 500.

area and take themselves out of the purview of the Romans to Pella in the Decapolis, the ten cities of the Gentiles, east of the Jordan River—cities the Romans did not attack.

### **The Flight to Pella (AD 66)**

“Hegesippus records that Saint James of Jerusalem had been cast down from the pinnacle of the Temple because he had claimed (in about AD 63) that the “Son of Man was coming on the clouds.” Apparently, the authorities dramatically pushed Saint James off the top of the Temple in mockery of the descent of the “Son of Man.”

However, James was not wrong. Things were about to get bad in Jerusalem’. Really bad.

“Eusebius describes it like this:

“The whole body, however, of the Church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. Here those that believed in Christ, having removed from Jerusalem, as if holy men had entirely abandoned the royal city itself, and the whole land of Judea; the divine justice, for their crimes against Christ and his Apostles finally overtook them, totally destroying the whole generation of these evildoers from the earth” (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3,5).

“...since the Roman armies did not appear until AD 66, the Flight to Pella most likely took place in the autumn of AD 66 after the Jews had won a short-lived victory and had driven the Roman troops back to Caesarea. There the Roman general Cestius Gallus sent word to Nero of the defeat and promptly committed suicide. At this point, the early Christians fled the city, but the Jews rejoiced, thinking God was favoring them in victory over the Romans. This peace lasted until the following year until the spring of AD 67 when Roman legions under Vespasian and Titus invaded Judea from the north and south. This campaign began in April of AD 67 and lasted another three-and-

a-half years until the destruction of Jerusalem in **September of AD 70.**<sup>145</sup>

### **On the Housetop – Matthew 24:17**

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

“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.”<sup>146</sup>

This would serve as an apocalyptic image for haste.

### **In the Field – Matthew 24:18**

***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....*** The fact that they were in the field and not in the city would suggest that the city had not yet been surrounded by the Romans or that the Roman armies had temporarily pulled back, leaving the fields available to be farmed. If they showed indications of returning to the city, then these instructions come into play.

However, these phrases in 24:17-18 may be stock images for the need for speed in the face of a coming catastrophe. They are presented as a warning of momentary disaster, so near that no time is possible to make preparation to leave. 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 so much a literal order to not go in the house and get your family, but an image of the need of

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<sup>145</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 189-190.

<sup>146</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 972.

haste 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!” Most parents can relate to that kind of hyperbolic language.

“Part of the sense is given by the recognition that the fate of the temple and city are 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.”<sup>147</sup>

It is a mystery why Christians want to rebuild that evil Temple and establish those evil people as the “people of God” a term appropriate only to the Church of Jesus Christ. They are the enemies of God and murders of Christ and his Church.

### **Those Pregnant and Nursing Babies – Matthew 24:19**

***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.”<sup>148</sup> “The note of urgency sounds again in the following verses. Time was of the essence, and quite simply, it is hard to be quick and mobile when you are pregnant or nursing.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 973.

<sup>148</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 973.

<sup>149</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 26.

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This warning may be a combination of a literal statement and a stock image. Again, the message is one of a coming disaster and the need for extreme haste.

### **Flight in the Winter or Sabbath – Matthew 24:20**

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

***may not be 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.”<sup>150</sup>

***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.”<sup>151</sup>

This warning about the Sabbath is a strong indicator of its first-century application. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century context, this would make little sense.

### **A Great Tribulation – Matthew 24:21**

***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.***

***great tribulation....*** Jesus “tells the disciples point blank that there will be an increase of sorrows in the world just before the destruction of Jerusalem. He calls these events ‘great tribulation’....

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<sup>150</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 974.

<sup>151</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 974.

- ❖ The tribulation is defined as something soon to come: 'this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled' (v.34).
- ❖ History will continue after the great tribulation: 'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be' (v.21, NKJV). That is, human life is going to continue for some time after this.

The Roman war against the Jews and the siege of Jerusalem (AD 64-70) was the '**great tribulation**.' It was the fulfillment of this prophecy. We have to interpret the text faithfully. If Jesus referred to *this* generation, then he meant *his* generation at the time he was speaking, not a generation two thousand years in the future."<sup>152</sup>

"Daniel 12 contains the length of the time of the Great Tribulation, which was three-and-a-half years—or 1290 days—from the Spring of AD 67 to September 70."<sup>153</sup>

Matthew 24:9 also 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, at 24:21, Matthew calls this new situation a "**great tribulation**."

But we must be careful; not every tribulation should be identified as "**the great tribulation**." 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)

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<sup>152</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 121-122.

<sup>153</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 239.

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The great tribulation in Matthew 24 and in Revelation 7 probably refers to the same event.

***such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now....*** It is not clear if this is hyperbolic apocalyptic language or factual. 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....”<sup>154</sup>

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

This fulfills a prophecy by Daniel.

*“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)

And so, God’s people were delivered.

***and never will be....*** According to D.A. Carson, “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.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> C. Marvin Pate, “A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and C. Marvin Pate, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 152.

<sup>155</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 501.

"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!"<sup>156</sup> If there is a time called "*ever will be again*," then there is yet more time and history in the years to follow. This incident is not the end of the entire world—but it is the end of the Jewish world.

### Do Not Believe It – Matthew 24:23

***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."<sup>157</sup> 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)*

This is the third time Jesus has made this point [24:5, 24:11, and now 24:23], why? It seems that false prophecy has been an ongoing problem from Deuteronomy to Matthew and to the dispensationalists of 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*

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<sup>156</sup> 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.

<sup>157</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 978.

*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)

In our generation, although in a way not as serious as this, we have ministers that do 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 Christians respond by doing what? By putting them out of the Church for being false prophets? No, by going to their next prophecy conference and by buying their next book. These false prophets, or at least these confused teachers, become incredibly wealthy. 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 many errors should alert them and us that something is wrong, and they should take action. They should stop writing, and we should stop listening because—“*the thing does not take place or prove true*.”

*And, instead, do what Jesus said, “do not believe it.”*

#### False Christs and False Prophets – Matthew 24:24-25

***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....*** There are two threats here, the first is from Israel, “false christs,” and the second is from the Church, “false prophets.”

***signs and wonders....*** We love signs and wonders; instead of trusting God, we can trust what we can see and hear. And so Jesus warns of these things.

“And such miraculous proofs were, according to Josephus, offered by several of the nationalist leaders: he mentions specifically the

parting of the Jordan (*Ant.* 20.97),<sup>158</sup> the collapse of the city walls (*Ant.* 20.170),<sup>159</sup> the uncovering of Moses' sacred vessels (*Ant.* 18.85),<sup>160</sup> as well as more generally conspicuous wonders and signs"

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<sup>158</sup> "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.

<sup>159</sup> "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.

<sup>160</sup> "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.

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(*Ant.* 20.168),<sup>161</sup> and God-given “signs of freedom” (*War* 2.259).<sup>162</sup>  
163”

These illustrations by Josephus illustrate the types of things happening in this period, things that corresponded to Jesus’ prophecy.

**elect....** The word elect<sup>164</sup> is used 23 times in the New Testament. Matthew uses elect four times, 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.

Have *you* been 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.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> ...”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.

<sup>162</sup> “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.

<sup>163</sup> 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.

<sup>164</sup> *elect ἐκλεκτός* “By implication meaning chosen, with the accessory idea of kindness, favor, love, equivalent to cherished, beloved.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>165</sup> 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.

### In the Desert or In the Inner Room – Matthew 24:26

***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. Both the **wilderness** and the **inner room** would doom you to destruction. In either place, the Roman armies will destroy you.

Only one place will be safe: ***"flee to the mountains"*** (24:16).

### The Visibility or Quickness of Lightning? – Matthew 24:27

***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.***

This is a passage that is often used to speak of the quickness of the rapture of the coming of Jesus. Is this the message?

***lightning....*** The image here is either of suddenness or visibility, an event that cannot be missed. Which is it?

One, Jesus' judgment coming was quick like lightning; the armies of Titus and Rome struck Jerusalem and the Temple swiftly and with a 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 Jesus will soon 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 does address events in the time frame of that generation—AD 30 to AD 70.

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

## When Will These Things Be?

that battle. That would speak to the Dispensationalists' interpretation of this passage. But instantaneous is only one of two possible meanings.

Two, 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 apparent that it cannot be missed, it is seen from one end of the sky to the other, 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)."<sup>166</sup>

An effort in looking for Jesus in the desert or an inner room does not correspond to the context of this verse, 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."<sup>167</sup> You won't need to look in secret places for the judgment coming of Christ; his appearance will be open for all to see.

**coming (παρουσία parousía)<sup>168</sup>....** There is a general opinion by some that the word *parousía* (παρουσία) refers only to the last

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<sup>166</sup> Gundry, Robert H. *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 108.

<sup>167</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 980.

<sup>168</sup> *coming παρουσία* "...to come to be present at a particular place—"to come, to arrive, to come to be present." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene

coming of Jesus, the last day in human history. It was used in 24:3 and is used here, 24:27, as well,

*“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).*

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

*“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)*

Some 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—his judgment coming or his last coming in time, his rapture of the Church. For many, the very use of *parousia* means

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Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

the last coming of Jesus at the end of time, and for them, it can mean nothing else, but that point is not proven, just assumed. Only the context can determine which coming, a judgment coming, or the last coming. So, don't get trapped in an unproven or unprovable argument.

### The Carcass and the Eagles – Matthew 24:28

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

Here we see that there is a relationship between the coming of the Son of Man and the words **corpse** and **vultures**. What is that relationship?

**vultures**<sup>169</sup>.... The Greek word here can be translated as either *vulture* or *eagle*. Both eagles and vultures are scavengers.

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."<sup>170</sup> "People will be able to miss the *parousia* no more than the vultures overlook a dead animal."<sup>171</sup> 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...."<sup>172</sup> We are not forced to pick between these options, the passage applies to both.

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<sup>169</sup> Vultures ἀετός *aetós*. "An eagle or vulture, a species of rapacious birds represented as preying on dead bodies...." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>170</sup> 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.

<sup>171</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 199.

<sup>172</sup> 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.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, God told Israel what would happen if they broke the covenant. And not only did they break the covenant, but they also 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)*

As a result of these actions, Matthew 24:28 is a clear-cut fulfillment of this Deuteronomy passage.

### **For the Elect’s Sake – Matthew 24:22**

***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....*** “Josephus records the fact that political upheaval in Rome indeed shortened the destructive siege, allowing for more survivors than normally would have been expected.”<sup>173</sup> Nero committed suicide, and Vespasian went to Rome to receive the crown. Soon thereafter, he ordered his son Titus to complete the war in Israel.

When Titus returned to Jerusalem, “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.”<sup>174</sup>

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

### **The Sun, the Moon, the Stars – Matthew 24:29**

***Matthew 24:29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,***

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<sup>173</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 26–27.

<sup>174</sup> 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.

***and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.***

***Immediately*** or *without delay*. “For the most part in Greek and always in the NT εὐθέως [immediately] 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.”<sup>175</sup>

“Imagine being with Jesus right after hearing all that He said. It seems obvious that you’d want to ask, “When will these things take place?” He makes it clear that these things won’t happen until other specific events take place. He then uses the word “immediately” to recount what will happen next.”<sup>176</sup> That being the case, when would *you* think these things would occur? In a few years, or in a few thousand years?

***after***<sup>177</sup>.... 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”<sup>178</sup> What will happen next is in close proximity with what just occurred.

***the tribulation***.... This is the third use of tribulation in Matthew 24.

*“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)*

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<sup>175</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005).

<sup>176</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 33–34.

<sup>177</sup> *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).

<sup>178</sup> 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 [during] 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)*

All these verses are specific to the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

**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)*

***Immediately after the tribulation of those days,*** we are told that four things will happen.

***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.***

Context and audience are foundational considerations in understanding what a given passage addresses. The context is the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple. The audience is Jesus’ disciples, who have asked 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, their minds would be drawn to these 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)*

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“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 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Also, consider these additional passages which speak of Jesus’ prophecies:

“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)

These verses in Joel are quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. So, about 52 days *before* Pentecost, this information was given by Jesus to Peter and the other Apostles on the Mount of Olives. Peter follows up 52 days *later* on the Day of Pentecost saying:

“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)

And in the same way that Jesus used these prophecies, Peter is also pointing to the present and near future as the context and fulfillment of these verses. 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.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus is using Old Testament apocalyptic language to make his point concerning the soon destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem, and Israel. “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?”<sup>179</sup> “

“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.”<sup>180</sup> The **sun, moon,** and **stars** refer to the political, religious, and social leaders of the nation. We use this terminology in the very same way. “We describe a person on the way up as a “rising star.” When a well-known person is found to have done wrong, we say “his star is tarnished” or “his star has fallen.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> 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.

<sup>180</sup> 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.

<sup>181</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, Fourth revised edition (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 144.

## When Will These Things Be?

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 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 that passage, we learn that these 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)*



**The Romans Destroying Jerusalem and Its Temple**

So, now in Israel, these personages, these national and religious leaders, 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.”<sup>182</sup>  
“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.”<sup>183</sup>

The world of first-century Israel will soon go dark.

### **The Sign of the Son of Man – Matthew 24:30**

***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.***

Our passage in Matthew 24 takes place 40 years after the passion of Jesus, during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 67-70. During this period, we read:

***Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man....*** Only after Matthew 24:4-29 will this next event ensue.

***appear in heaven....*** Or to become *visible* in the sky.

***the sign***<sup>184</sup>.... Jesus was asked about a sign in verse 24:3; he began to address the ***sign*** question in verse 24:15, but this verse is the first time he uses the word ***sign*** since then. Some people incorrectly read this verse as “*then will appear in heaven the Son of Man,*” but it does not really say that.

The disciples did ask for ***the sign*** of Jesus’ coming and of the end of the [Jewish] age in Matthew 24:3. Interestingly, in about two days, Jesus will tell those who are about to murder him:

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<sup>182</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 143.

<sup>183</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 149.

<sup>184</sup> *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).

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*“...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 at his trial, Jesus says, “you will see the Son of Man” Matthew 26:64. But in this passage, to his disciples, he says, “then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man” Matthew 24:30. Close, but not the same statement. Jesus is not saying that everyone will see the Son of Man, some will and some will not, but all alive in Jerusalem at that time will see **the sign** of his coming.

But if we limit this appearing to a **sign**, then **what sign appeared in heaven?** There are indications, but we are not sure. Although those that were alive then would not have had a problem 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 [Matthew 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.<sup>185</sup>

This is a 2,000 year-old quote by Josephus, who was not a Christian, and it is what he heard from others during the siege of Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. What does it mean?

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 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.

*“Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of the young*

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<sup>185</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Wars, 6:5:3.

*man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*” (2 Kings 6:17, ESV)

We also see this 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)



**Jesus' Attacking Jerusalem**

***the sign....*** As Josephus tells us, “chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and

## When Will These Things Be?

surrounding the cities.<sup>186</sup> “The standard [sign], the banner of the Son of Man, unfurls in the heavens, as he himself returns in splendor and power.”<sup>187</sup> That is one very impressive possibility as to what that 1<sup>st</sup>-century sign was.

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

“Tribes” are associated with Israel often in the Bible.

*“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)*

**mourn**<sup>188</sup>.... Or **wail** or **lament**. If you ever wondered if Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation were telling the same story (they are), 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 or mourn] on account of him. Even so. Amen.” (Revelation 1:7, ESV)*

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<sup>186</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Wars, 6:5:3.

<sup>187</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 505.

<sup>188</sup> *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* [κόπτω] *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, wailing] 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.”<sup>189</sup>

*“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.”<sup>190</sup>

***they will see the Son of Man....*** Just recently, we talked about the sign what 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 [or sign], the banner of the Son of Man, unfurls in the heavens, as he himself

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<sup>189</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 924.

<sup>190</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 925.

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returns in splendor and power.”<sup>191</sup> But although some only saw the *sign* as reported by Josephus, others saw “the Son of Man” as well.

*“Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.””*  
(Matthew 26:64, NKJV)

**coming on the clouds....** “In the Ugaritic texts, the god Baal is called “the one who rides the clouds.” The description became an official title of Baal, whom the entire ancient Near Eastern world considered a deity of rank. To ancient people all over the Mediterranean, Israelite or not, the “one who rides the clouds” was a deity—his status as a god was unquestioned. Consequently, any figure to whom the title was attributed was a god. ...

Old Testament writers were quite familiar with Baal. Baal was the main source of consternation about Israel’s propensity toward idolatry. In an effort to make the point that Yahweh, the God of Israel, deserved worship instead of Baal, the biblical writers occasionally pilfered this stock description of Baal as “cloud rider”....”<sup>192</sup>

Coming on the clouds is an apocalyptic phrase found in scripture, that means “God is coming.” And that is exactly what Jesus is saying here. When they see the judgment clouds of God, they are to see the Son of Man—Jesus Christ.

*“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*

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<sup>191</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 505.

<sup>192</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 251.

*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 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 Jesus said to the High Priest:

*“...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)*

The High Priest knew that Jesus was quoting Daniel 7:13 which reads:

*“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*

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*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)*

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)*

We might also mention that this is what James the brother of Jesus said at his martyrdom: "In *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*...we learn of an incident that led to the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus. The original story comes from the second-century historian Hegesippus who wrote his notes on the history of the church between A.D. 165 and 175. As the story is told, when James was called by a group of Scribes and Pharisees to establish what he believed was the truth of the claimed Messiahship of Jesus, Hegesippus reports James as stating, "Why do you ask me respecting Jesus the Son of Man? He is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven."<sup>193</sup>

In seeing 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.

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<sup>193</sup> Gary DeMar and Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Early Church and the End of the World* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2006), 34–35.

### He Will Gather Together His Elect – Matthew 24:31

***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.***

Now certainly that speaks of the rapture sometime in the distant future—does it not? Not necessarily. It is true, however, that this verse is presented as proof that this Discourse is speaking of the last days of human history because this is clearly speaking of the rapture. This point is supported by these verses:

*“...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.” 1 Corinthians 15:52*

*“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, ESV)*

Let's look at these four clauses:

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

One, ***angels***.... There is an abundance of illustrations that show that angels, or messengers, can be either heavenly beings or human beings. Which one here? They are the messengers of God, the evangelists, and the pastors of the New Covenant. We see this in the Book of Revelation.

*“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)*

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An important point, God does not write letters to heavenly angels, not that we know of at least. But he has for many hundreds of years sent letters to his “people.”

Two, **trumpet**<sup>194</sup>.... In the Old Testament, the angels or prophets of the Old Covenant sounded the call of God, gathering the Old Covenant community for **worship** or **war** employing the trumpets of God.

*“... When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.”* (Exodus 19:13, ESV) See Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18; Lev 23:24; 25:9.

*“And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.”* (Numbers 10:9, ESV) See Joshua 6:4-6.

But now this Old Covenant age has drawn to a close and will end employing the sanctions of that covenant. Jesus has instituted a New Covenant in His blood (Matthew 26:26-29), and 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 period of the Old Covenant. It is now time to implement the New Covenant community fully and send out the new messengers 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.

In the Scripture, trumpets generally sound for one of two reasons; either calling Israel to war or calling Israel to worship. They served much as church bells did in the middle ages.

The war trumpets of God’s judgments are demonstrated in the Book of Revelation.

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<sup>194</sup> *trumpet* σάλπιγξ “...the sound made by a trumpet—‘trumpet blast, trumpet sound.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

*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."*

As already mentioned, on the last day in history, there is another trumpet that will sound again; this trumpet will be a call to worship, the greatest call to worship ever sounded in human history.

*"...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." 1 Corinthians 15:52*

*"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." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, NKJV)*

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

In between, 1) the trumpets of judgment for Israel, and 3) the trumpets of the triumphant conclusion of human history, are 2) the trumpets of a holy convocation, the ingathering of the 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*

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*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)*

Three, **gather**<sup>195</sup>.... Before we go further, let's address an error associated with this Greek word. Some believe that the Greek word 'gather together' *episunago ἐπισυνάγω*, is "the" Greek word that describes the rapture; this is false. This word, in all cases, means to gather together *on this earth* for one reason or another.

Matthew 23:37 "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 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.

Mark 1:33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

Mark 13:27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Luke 12:1 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one

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<sup>195</sup> *gather ἐπισυνάγω* "...to cause to come together to, toward, or at a particular location—"to cause to come together, to gather together." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Luke 13:34 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!

Luke 17:37 And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."

**In none of these cases was Jesus trying to rapture anyone!**

James uses this same term to describe the gathering of the church for worship saying:

*"For if there should come into your assembly [sunagōgē or synagogue] a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes," (James 2:2, NKJV)*

Later, the New Testament community also used the term Church (*ekklēsia*),<sup>196</sup> which essentially means the same thing.

The Jews continued to use the term *sunagōgē*, although Jesus would reject their gatherings and called them "a *synagogue of Satan*."

*"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (Revelation 2:9, NKJV)*

Later, however, Paul will use the noun of this word in an eschatological context. This passage may refer to Jesus' coming in AD 70 as well.

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<sup>196</sup> 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).

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*“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together (ἐπισυναγωγή episunagōgē) to Him, we ask you....”*  
(2 Thessalonians 2:1, NKJV)

Yet this passage may refer to Jesus’ coming in AD 70 as well.

*“...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)

It is this statement about “a letter” that causes one to consider the possibility of the Thessalonians receiving “a letter” telling them of the judgment coming of Jesus at Jerusalem—not of them receiving “a letter” telling them of the rapture! This is one letter you never want to receive.

In addition, the noun variation (ἐπισυναγωγή episunagōgē) is also used of God’s church gathering to worship.

*“...not forsaking the assembling (ἐπισυναγωγή episunagōgē) of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:25, NKJV)

So, the use of this Greek word, to gather (ἐπισυναγωγή episunagōgē), addresses **our gathering for worship**, not a gathering in the sky, the rapture.

Four, ***His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other***. This “refers to the growth of the kingdom of God, not the final consummation.”<sup>197</sup>

“The four-winds imagery is designed to include all directions...as far as the heavenly vault reaches, so far will the angels [messengers] go

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<sup>197</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 242.

to gather the elect in.”<sup>198</sup> In other words, evangelism to the whole world.

### 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 see the judgment of Israel and Jerusalem in 24:29-30.
- 2) This is followed by the story of the angels, a trumpet call, and the gathering of the Covenant elect in His Church at 24:31.
- 3) This is followed by the parable of the fig tree, which shows the completion of the material on the judgment on Israel (24:32-33).

An explanation that fails to explain verse 24:31 in the context of verses 24:29-30 and 24:32, the material before and after this verse, 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 on Israel.

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 to Himself, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The gathering of the Old Covenant community using **messengers** and **trumpets** has now ended. The trumpets earlier sounded were for war, and Israel has been destroyed. But, Jesus has instituted a New Covenant, it is now time to implement the New Covenant community, and send out the messengers (angels) 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.

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<sup>198</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 986.

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Remember, verse 24:31 is between the inclusio 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)*

One's interpretation for verse 31, *must fit within the framework of 23:36 and 24:34; it is something that happened in that generation.*

### Learn from the Fig Tree – Matthew 24:32

***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.***

#### A Summary 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 certainly rely on my prediction (v. 35)."<sup>199</sup>

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."<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 928.

<sup>200</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 929.

***From the fig tree learn its lesson....*** “The thrust here is, ‘Let the fig tree become your teacher.’”<sup>201</sup> 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, but the blooming of the fig tree says that summer is upon you *now*.

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

### **At the Very Gates – Matthew 24:33**

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

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

***all these things....*** This phrase is mentioned four times in this chapter.

*“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)

*“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)

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

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<sup>201</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 987.

## When Will These Things Be?

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

This phrase, **all these things**, defines the context and is an inclusio<sup>202</sup> between 24:2 & 3 and 24:33 & 34. An inclusio is a literary tool indicating immediate context. The phrase “*all these things*” refers to the soon destruction of the temple, *not* to something that will happen two or three thousand years later.

**he is near....** The word “*is*” is a verb in the third person singular. Therefore, it could be translated *he*, *she* or *it is near*, 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 the better translation—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 indeed, 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. In the context of the first century, Jesus was referring to the Roman armies soon to be at the gates of Jerusalem.

### This Generation – Matthew 24:34

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

Earlier Jesus said:

*“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*

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<sup>202</sup> “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>

*towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*" (Matthew 10:23, ESV)

*"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 16:28, ESV)

These two verses were spoken in prior years by Jesus in anticipation of the passage before us. They make no sense if 2000 years is to pass before he comes again. And that is the point of the liberal response to these verses, they simply say, Jesus was just wrong. "Notwithstanding his best efforts, he was simply not able to predict the future." That is the logical response if Jesus did not return in that generation. But he did return, he was not wrong. It is the liberal and the dispensationalists that have it wrong.

***this generation***<sup>203</sup>.... It is not "***that***" generation that Jesus is speaking of, some generation in the distant future, but "***this***" very one. "Matthew uses *geneá* (γενεά) [generation] here for the tenth time. ...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."<sup>204</sup> "'This generation' ... can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke."<sup>205</sup>

The phrase "*this generation*" is an inclusio around the content of the material between the two verses, 23:36 and 24:34.

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<sup>203</sup> *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.'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>204</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 988-989.

<sup>205</sup> D. A. Carson, "*Matthew*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 507.

## When Will These Things Be?

*“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)*

The content spoken by Jesus between these two verses is to occur in the generation of his then-current audience; this anchors that message in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel.

***will by no means pass away***<sup>206</sup>.... And they did not pass away until these events took place.

### History of Interpretation

“Until well into the eighteenth century, there were essentially two competing types of interpretation of v. 34. ...

The older type understands γενεά as “generation” and then interprets “all these things” to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. ...

The second [Dispensational] type interprets “all these things” to refer to the end of the world and then, in order to keep from attributing to Jesus an unfulfilled prediction, must give γενεά a new interpretation that can apply to a later age. To them, it means either the Jewish people, the church, humanity, or several things together. ...

[Liberals] discovered that Jesus expected that the end was near and, at the same time, that Jesus was mistaken in that expectation. The failure of Jesus here was a product of “the ignorance even of the Son....”<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> *pass away παρέρχομαι* “...to mark the passage of time, with focus upon completion—‘to pass, to have passed, past.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>207</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2005), 210.

So, in addition to the liberals to whom Jesus' failure to "guess" the future is "common knowledge," there are also the Dispensationalists that do not believe Jesus was wrong in his prophecy, but that the Church was wrong in assuming it was in the first century. They move "this generation" to "that generation," the last generation in human history, insisting that the word generation addresses something other than Jesus' current audience. This view was developed after 1830 by John Nelson Darby and popularized by C. I. Scofield in his reference Bible. It is a part of his teaching that there would be a rebuilt Temple in the last days and that Jesus is referring to the destruction of *that* Temple. However, there is no rebuilding of the Temple mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. Like so much of his eschatology, *John Nelson Darby made it up*.

### **Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away – Matthew 24:35**

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

***Heaven and earth will pass away....*** In God's plan, laws change. The laws that governed life in the Garden of Eden changed after the fall with the entry of sin and death into the world. Some of the laws that governed the world before the flood dramatically changed after that event. The laws that governed Israel changed with the coming of Jesus and the destruction of Israel. And the laws that now govern our world will change again in eternity after the world we know comes to an end.

There are two conditions listed here for how long the Law and the Prophets will continue in force: 1) Until heaven and earth pass away. And 2) until all things are accomplished, or until they occur. It is the prerogative of the creator of the laws of the universe to change them when it meets his purpose. God's laws have changed, and they will do so again.

The phrase, "***until heaven and earth pass away***," is distinctly eschatological and implies either 1) the end of the world or 2) the end of an age. Which does it mean here?

These words in the Olivet Discourse are part of the inclusio "*this generation will not pass away*" found in Matthew 23:35 and again in 24:34. The generation spoken of was the one existing when Jesus

## When Will These Things Be?

said these words. The eschatological events between these two verses were the events that culminated by A.D. 70 when the Temple, the City, and the nation of Israel were destroyed. Thus, for Israel, *Heaven and earth passed away*. It was the end of the Jewish age.

Earlier Jesus said something 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)*

In the Sermon on the Mount, and here in the Olivet Discourse Jesus says that his teachings are as sure as the continuation of the universe itself.

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 happen in that very generation to which he was speaking.

The material addressed before Matthew 24:34-35 did see their fulfillment in the 40 years between Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Now would be a good time to remind ourselves of something Jesus 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. 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,<sup>208</sup> you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain [Mount Zion, Jerusalem], ‘Be removed and be cast*

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<sup>208</sup> Doubt διακρίνω *diakrínō* “to distinguish, decide, judge,” or discriminate by exercising a bias for Israel! Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

*into the sea,*’ [the Gentile world] *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, the disciples had come to the point that they could overcome their nationalist bias and 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.

“It seems to me that the most natural reading of Matthew 24:29–35 would be that everything Jesus said would happen has already taken place in history. He was not referring to a yet-future fulfillment from our standpoint. He was referring to a judgment upon the nation of Israel that took place in AD 70.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Are These the Last Days?*, First edition, vol. 20, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL; Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), 39–41.

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**Part Two – And the End of the World – (24:36-25:13)**

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We've come to a point in our study where we now experience a significant break. It is so noticeable that 4 timing indicators point to it.

Let's review just a bit. This discourse began when the disciples asked this question:

*"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)

The first question, "*when will these things be*," was answered in verses 24:4-14.

The second question, "*what will be the sign of your coming*," was answered in 24:15-35.

The third question, "*and of the end of the age*" or, the end of the world, is now before us in 24:36-25:46. It is by far the largest of the three sections. As indicated, several timing indicators help us distinguish this from the prior periods.

### **Timing Indicator #1 for the End of the World**

Earlier, verse 24:33 made it clear that one could **know** that "***all these things***" were near, ***at the very gates***. That was because "... *this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*." (Matthew 24:34, NKJV). So, what was near, what was at the very gates would occur in that very generation, the destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and its Temple in A.D. 70.

However, 24:36, our current verse, speaks of a far distant event, stating "***of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven***." Something has changed. This new statement is a significant break in our story. Before this verse, the disciples could know the timing of Jesus' coming in judgment on Israel; indeed, it was ***at the very gates*** (24:31). But after this point, we read, *no one*

*knows the day or the hour.* Of what? It is of Jesus' final coming in history; this is now our new subject.

### Timing Indicator #2 for the End of the World

At the beginning of 24:36, we read two Greek words translated, “**but concerning**.”<sup>210</sup> The combination of these two Greek words is found 16 times in the Greek New Testament.<sup>211</sup>

What do the 16 incidents of these two Greek words have in common? They point to the fact that the subject following is *new material*. They do not return the reader to the previous paragraph, statement, or subject. And that is the point here in Matthew 24:36; this phrase, “**but concerning**,” moves the reader forward to new material associated with future events. We are no longer addressing the last few verses—the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but we are instead moving into new territory

### Timing Indicator #3 for the End of the World

The new material in 24:36 is identified as something occurring on **that day**. There are two ways the word “**that**” can be used. One, it may refer back to the material just completed, 24:32-35. Or, two, it may reference the future, the last coming of Jesus in time. However, in conjunction with the phrase **but concerning (that day)**, it plainly moves the discussion on to future events.

The following verses give an illustration of how **that** is used for a future event.

*“On **that day** many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’” (Matthew 7:22, ESV)*

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<sup>210</sup> “Περί δὲ -- but concerning.

<sup>211</sup> Matthew 20:6, Matthew 22:31, Matthew 24:36, Matthew 27:46, Mark 12:26, Mark 13:32, John 16:11, Acts 21:25, 1 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Corinthians 7:25, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 12:1, 1 Corinthians 16:1, 1 Corinthians 16:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:1.

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*“which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.”*  
(2 Timothy 1:12, ESV)

### Timing Indicator #4 for the End of the World

Beginning with 24:36, we have new inclusions “*day and hour*”—“*no one knows*.” We see it again in Matthew 25:13. This inclusio initiates a new section. But, does this new section address the near future or the distant future?

In 24:36, our current verse, Jesus begins to speak with *uncertainty* saying, “*no one knows*.” In the first inclusio 23:36 to 24:34 concerning that generation, he knows that certain things will not happen soon. But in the second inclusio 24:36 to 25:23, He says that *no one knows* when these things will happen.

For this reason, we must conclude that there are two distinct sections here, one, 23:36 to 24:35, addressing the near future, and a second, 24:36 to 25:46, addressing the distant future. The abundance of timing indicators at this point makes that clear.

**But Concerning That Day and Hour –**  
**Inclusio—Day and Hour: (Matthew 24:36 and 25:13)**  
**Key Word—Hour: (Matthew 44:43, 24:44, 24:50)**

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

***day and hour....*** As stated, this phrase ***day and hour*** introduce a new inclusio around 24:36-25:13.

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

This helps us understand that his final coming will be *without* signs; it will be an utter surprise.

**no one knows**.... As indicated, the “*day and hour*” inclusio and this “*no one knows*” statement makes significant breaks between this and the last pericope.

Note that Jesus had just finished telling His disciples about all the signs that would precede the “abomination of desolation,” prior to which they would see the city of Jerusalem “surrounded by armies.” He also puts a time limit on the events, “*this generation shall not pass.*” How then can “*that day*” be a time “no one knows” when Jesus has just finished telling His disciples “when you see all these things, *know that it is near*”?<sup>212</sup> “In very strong contrast to the emphasis in 24:33 concerning what *can* be known—namely, the experienced signs of the interim up to the point of the nearness of the parousia of the Son of Man [the judgment coming of Jesus]—the present verse clearly indicates the *impossibility* of knowing the time of the Son of Man’s coming and the end of the age in advance of their actual occurrence....”<sup>213</sup>

But people want to know. In fact, like many in our day, the Thessalonians were also asking about the times and the seasons, or signs of the day of the Lord. But Jesus had already responded, saying there will be no signs, but his final coming will be like a thief in the night (24:43).

*“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1–2, ESV)*

Signs were for the *judgment coming* of Jesus to Israel; the *last coming in time* will not be preceded by signs for **no one knows** (Matthew 24:36). Peter also speaks to this coming saying,

*“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (2 Peter 3:10, ESV)*

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<sup>212</sup> Jay Rogers, In the Days of These Kings, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 250.

<sup>213</sup> Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14–28 (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 716.

## When Will These Things Be?

People do not know when thieves are going to come.

***not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son....*** We see that even the Son, while on earth, is not privy to this information.

This verse confirms the closure of Matthew 24:34-35; up to that point, Jesus had knowledge *when* these things would happen— “*this generation.*” After that point, Jesus had no knowledge of the timing of the material that was to follow.

This verse deals with *day and hour* questions. It does not deal with whether these things will happen or not; that fact is inevitable. “Such a warning prevents those who are suffering from building up undue expectations of the time that would set them up for exploitation (24:23–27) ....”<sup>214</sup> This, of course, is exactly what is happening today.

And in fact, this is how the Church was exploited right before Jesus’ judgment coming in the first century.

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

*“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.” (Matthew 24:26, ESV)*

And, this is how the Church is being exploited *today* by modern Dispensationalists.

Exploitation is what Christians are undergoing with the constant refrain, “Look, here is the Christ!” But Christian, Jesus has told you otherwise; do not allow yourself to be exploited by that next book blaring out that [dispen]sensationalists headline, “*Twenty-One reasons Jesus is Coming in 2021,*” just \$35.95, get yours today! Instead, remember Jesus’ words, “*no one knows*” (24:36; 25:13).

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<sup>214</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 590.

*“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7, ESV)*

**Those Taken and Those Left – (24:37-24:41)**

**In Noah’s Day—No One Knew – Matthew 24:37–39**

***Matthew 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.***

How did the “*days of Noah*” come upon that ancient pre-flood generation? It was a total surprise!

***Matthew 24:38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,***

“What was the day like for the people of Noah’s generation? It was like any new morning—no alarm and no thought for their doom. Jesus makes this point in portraying his own sudden coming. That generation will be like Noah’s, “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.... They are carrying on with the normal affairs of their lives...”<sup>215</sup> Because the day and hour are unknown, people will be just as unaware when it happens, as they were in the days of Noah. These subjects: eating, drinking, and marriage are not mentioned here as illustrations of excess. Indeed, they are everyday activities of a normal life. These people did not perceive a coming judgment; neither will they at his last coming at the end of the world. It will be just another ordinary day.

Luke says something similar:

*“Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building....”*  
(Luke 17:28, ESV)

And like in Matthew, these are normal activities in a person’s life.

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<sup>215</sup> K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 376.

## When Will These Things Be?

“Jesus is focusing not on immorality or licentiousness but on a total preoccupation with everyday affairs. The people of both Noah’s day and his day are so engrossed in the routines of another day, the routines of another year, that eschatological awareness and openness are missing.”<sup>216</sup>

Compare this with the picture Jesus just put before the apostles of his judgment coming upon Israel:

*“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” (Matthew 24:7, ESV)*

“This is a rather amazing contrast to the other details concerning the time of Jacob’s Trouble.”<sup>217</sup> Some believe that Jesus’ final coming at the end of time will be in a period of crisis often associated with the Great Tribulation. Jesus says otherwise; it will be an amazingly typical, even quiet, day. “...this incalculability, not-knowing, or normalcy paragraph is in an almost unbearable tension with the preceding Sermon of Signs, especially with the...abomination of desolation and the astral chaos.... *Signs* and *normalcy* are two different and contradictory phenomena.”<sup>218</sup>

So, the next time you hear someone touting “wars and rumors of wars,” leave it behind! The opposite is found in Scripture: *eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building*—normal behavior!

*“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)*

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<sup>216</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 329.

<sup>217</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 309.

<sup>218</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 527.

It's not apocalyptic signs of *war and rumors of wars* that point to the last coming of Jesus; it is "*peace and security*" that indicates the time of his final coming in history. "Peace and Security" are the only signs of Jesus' last coming.

***Matthew 24:39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.***

Why were they **unaware**? Because *there were no indicators of a soon-coming judgment*. Peter addresses this same future event saying:

*"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, ESV)

Nothing extraordinary will be happening; there simply are no "signs."

***swept them all away*** or ***took*** [αἶψα, αἶρό<sup>219</sup> ***them all away***.... Some Dispensationalists use this verse to prove the rapture (*took them all away*). However, as is so often the case, it is taken out of context. The comment is about those in Noah's day who were *taken*. It cannot be an analogy concerning the Church today, for it was the rebellious, God-hating world that was *taken in judgment*, not Noah and his family. Luke talks about this saying, "*and the flood came and destroyed them all.*" (Luke 17:27, ESV). "In the logic of Jesus's discourse on his return (Matt. 24:36ff.), it is those "taken away" who are destroyed in judgment (v. 39) while those "left behind" are the saved, even as Noah was "left behind" after the waters receded."<sup>220</sup>

That is how they were taken—in destruction, not a good illustration of the rapture of the Church!

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<sup>219</sup> *swept αἶψα* "...to lift up and carry (away)—'to carry (away), to carry off, to remove, to take (away).'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 206.

<sup>220</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Ivan D. V. De Silva, *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021).

## Two Men in the Field - Matthew 24:40

**Matthew 24:40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.**

Verse 39 speaks of the judgment of those taken by the flood. But in 24:40 and 41, it is not immediately clear if the ones taken are *delivered from judgment* or *taken in judgment*.

“Historically, some have interpreted these passages as describing the rapture/catching up of believers (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). In that view (popularized in *Left Behind*, the recent Christian book series), the ones taken away in this passage are those blessed enough to be caught up to Messiah’s presence in the clouds. The others are left behind for the judgment of the Great Tribulation and the last war.”<sup>221</sup> However, the Great Tribulation occurred in A.D. 70 and is now past. And the day of his last return is a rather quiet one as Jesus just said in verses 38 and 39. So, the Left Behind scenario is out of touch with the teachings of scripture. As a result, we should look again at this word, *taken*.

**taken**<sup>222</sup>.... This word [παράλαμβάνω *paralambánō*]<sup>223</sup> can be understood in both a positive or a negative sense; to be taken to God or taken in judgment. In the context of the last verse, “the flood came and **took** them all away,” it is clearly used in a negative sense, taken in judgment. “The “taking” here and in ver. 40 is not the rapture of the church, but the gathering out of all things that offend described in the parable of the wheat and tares (and thus parallel to the destruction of the wicked that were “taken” in the flood of Noah....”<sup>224</sup> The flood *swept them all away* (24:39); it did not sweep

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<sup>221</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 310.

<sup>222</sup> *taken* παράλαμβάνω “...to take or bring someone along with—“to take along, to bring along.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 202.

<sup>223</sup> *taken* παράλαμβάνω “to take, receive. To take near, with, or to oneself, to receive to oneself.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>224</sup> Jerome H. Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge: The Most Complete Listing of Cross References Available Anywhere- Every Verse*.

Noah and his family away; it swept the world away. Noah was “left behind” for God’s kingdom while the others were taken away, not for blessing, but for judgment.”<sup>225</sup> We read the same storyline in Jesus’ parables.

*“Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”* (Matthew 13:30, ESV)

*“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 13:41–42, ESV)

The ones that are taken, the ones that are gathered first are destined for judgment. Those *left behind* are for Christ’s glory and heaven.

### Two Women at the Mill – Matthew 24:41

***Matthew 24:41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.***

This is similar to the story of Noah and the men in the field; the ones taken are taken in judgment—not the rapture. The ones left will enter the kingdom.

Working in a field and grinding at a mill are typical activities of people not expecting anything unusual to happen. In Matthew 13:30, it is the *first* of the two groups that are taken in judgment.

*“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”*  
(Matthew 13:30, ESV)

“The men and women left behind in the latter-day will be left to enter the blessing of the Messianic Kingdom on Earth. It is those who are

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*Every Theme, Every Important Word* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 1084.

<sup>225</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 310.

taken [παραλαμβάνω *paralambánō*]<sup>226</sup> away that will have to contend with the impending judgment of God.”<sup>227</sup>

### The Homeowner and The Thief – Matthew 24:42–44

***Matthew 24:42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.***

The message continues to be of an alert preparedness for the Lord’s *unexpected* return.

***stay awake***<sup>228</sup>.... Staying awake and watching are not signs. They are acts of faith and spiritual preparation. Because there are no signs, one must always be prepared. Staying awake does not tell us which night the thief will come; we are to be ready for any night.

We will see this word, ***stay awake***, again in verse 25:13, which gives us another inclusio. Interestingly, the inclusio “*the day and the hour*” (24:36) is also concluded at 25:13. That makes it a hard close, something a little different will follow.

***coming***<sup>229</sup>.... Comparing the coming of verse 37 [*parousía*, παρουσία] with the coming of this verse [*érchomai*, ἔρχομαι<sup>230</sup>], we see that these words are used *interchangeably*. They can both

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<sup>226</sup> *taken παραλαμβάνω* “to take, receive. To take near, with, or to oneself, to receive to oneself.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>227</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 310.

<sup>228</sup> *stay awake γρηγορέω* “To watch, to refrain from sleep. It was transferred in meaning from the physical to the moral religious sphere....” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>229</sup> *coming ἔρχομαι* “...to move toward or up to the reference point of the viewpoint character or event—‘to come, coming.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>230</sup> *coming ἔρχομαι* “...to move toward or up to the reference point of the viewpoint character or event—‘to come, coming.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

address the AD 70 coming, or they can both address the end of time coming—as this verse does.

***Matthew 24:43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.***

***the thief....*** "...the disciples know the owner of a house would watch if he knew when the thief was coming ... so the thief could not break in.... Since no one knows at what time, or during what "watch," the thief might strike, constant vigilance is required."<sup>231</sup>

We have here a very short parable on the value of alertness. It ensures that one is not taken by surprise and, in doing so, suffers loss. This phrase "*thief in the night*" is repeated in the epistles:

*"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."* (1 Thessalonians 5:2, ESV)

*"But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief."* (1 Thessalonians 5:4, ESV)

*"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."* (2 Peter 3:10, ESV)

*"Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."* (Revelation 3:3, ESV)

Not much about signs in these verses! His coming is very unexpected. By the way, where do you think Paul, Peter, and John got this idea of Jesus coming with no signs, like a thief? From Jesus in the Olivet Discourse? You think!

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<sup>231</sup> D. A. Carson, "*Matthew*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 510.

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There are many Christians today that are looking for the “signs of his coming.” Those signs mentioned in the earlier section in the Discourse, 24:1-24:35, were for his judgment coming to Jerusalem and his Temple. That is now past. The last coming of Jesus will have no signs. And that is the whole point of these parables, “Obviously a thief does not announce his arrival in advance but comes when not expected.”<sup>232</sup> And Jesus will not announce his either; there will be no *signs of the times* at his last coming.

***Matthew 24:44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.***

The message of vv. 36–43 is now summed up in a clear call to be ready for His coming at any time.

***for the Son of Man is coming<sup>233</sup> at an hour you do not expect.***  
“The burglar illustrates not only that the time of the *arouse* is unknown, but more specifically that it will be “a time you don’t expect.”<sup>234</sup>

This is a refrain; Jesus speaks it repeatedly.

*“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)

Did you get that? No one knows! It’s unexpected; *there are no signs*.

### ***The Two Servants – Matthew 24:45–51***

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<sup>232</sup> Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011), 311.

<sup>233</sup> ἐρχομαι *érchomai* “...to move toward or up to the reference point of the viewpoint character or event—‘to come, coming.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>234</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 943.

**Matthew 24:45** *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?”*

**Who....** Jesus is not asking his disciples for the name of this person. This is a literary technique, “a way of inviting his hearers to reflect on their own state of readiness.”<sup>235</sup>

**to give them their food....** “...the readiness of the good slave consists not in sitting by the window *watching* for his master, but in getting on with the job he has been given, while the fault of the bad slave is in his assumption that the master will not be back soon and that therefore he will not be held to account.”<sup>236</sup>

How much time and money are daily wasted by Christians trying to figure out when the master is coming? Thousands of hours and millions of dollars on end-of-the-world prophecy books, films, and end-times Bible conferences waste fortunes and lives—all contrary to these teachings of Jesus!

**Matthew 24:46** *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.*<sup>237</sup>

**when he comes.** He will come, that is not in dispute.

**Matthew 24:47** *Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.*

Interestingly, “The reward for faithful service is the opportunity of serving in a higher and more responsible place (not ease and rest

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<sup>235</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 944.

<sup>236</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 944.

<sup>237</sup> comes ἐρχομαι “to move toward or up to the reference point of the viewpoint character or event—‘to come, coming.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 192.

## When Will These Things Be?

forevermore).”<sup>238</sup> “...faithful disciples will welcome this further and heavier commitment rather than feeling that they have earned a rest.”<sup>239</sup> They will be energized and empowered for this service as well.

***Matthew 24:48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’***

***delayed***<sup>240</sup>.... If the judgment coming of Jesus in A.D. 70 would be considered a long time by some—40 years, how much more the delay of over 2,000 years and counting? Because it does seem delayed, it is relegated by many to a fairytale.

*“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, ESV)*

***Matthew 24:49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards,***

***beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards....***

Given the assumption that there will be no accountability, the real character of the man reveals itself; he is *wicked*. He has no long-term perspective on his responsibilities before the master; he lives for the moment.

***Matthew 24:50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know***

***a day when he does not expect him and at an hour....*** It is this element, a *day and hour*, which began this section at 24:36 on the

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<sup>238</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 616.

<sup>239</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 944.

<sup>240</sup> *delayed* χρονίζω “To while away time, linger, delay, defer, tarry....” Spiros Zochiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

final coming of Jesus at the end of the ages; it will end the material at 25:13. There are no signs; *he will not be expected*.

***Matthew 24:51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

***cut him in pieces....*** The image is one of total destruction for the unfaithful servant; he is literally cut into several pieces. There is a coming day of judgment.

***weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** This conclusion takes us to the final judgment, not to a temporal one at A.D. 70. Other passages use the same weeping and gnashing of teeth terminology. Individually and collectively, they all refer to the final judgment at the end of time.

*"...while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 8:12, ESV)

*"and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 13:42, 13:50, ESV)

*"Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 22:13, ESV)*

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

"The good servant is prepared for his Lord at any time, is faithful throughout his delay, and in the end is highly rewarded. The wicked servant is faithless in his responsibilities, abusive to fellow servants,

lax in waiting for his master's return, and ultimately earns the punishment that is his due...."<sup>241</sup>

## Chapter 25

### The Ten Virgins – Matthew 25:1–13

**Matthew 25:1** *Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*

**Then....** "This future perspective is underlined by the opening "*Then*," which refers back to the "day" and "hour" which have been the focus of this discourse since 24:36."<sup>242</sup>

**kingdom of heaven....** This is the second time that Jesus gave a parable about the kingdom of heaven and a wedding feast; earlier we read:

*"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come." (Matthew 22:2–3, ESV)*

In the first story, those called were not *willing* to come to the wedding. In this story, the virgins were not *prepared* to come.

**ten virgins....** These would have been very young girls in the 12 to 16-year-old range. Many girls after age 16 or so would have been married.

The ten virgins were probably escorting the bridegroom, with his bride to be, to the wedding and the feast to follow. As you can tell from the story, in the ancient Near East, the bridegroom was the center of attention and is escorted by the maidens, unlike our

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<sup>241</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 510.

<sup>242</sup> R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 948.

Western custom in which the bride is the center of attention escorted by the bridesmaids.

**took their lamps....** The wedding is held at night and lamps are needed to see well. “That all ten take their lamps and go out to meet the bridegroom suggests, as the parable will corroborate in a moment, that all ten are *professing* Christians coming to meet their Lord.”<sup>243</sup>

**lamps or torches....** “The portable torches for outdoor use...would be bundles of cloth mounted on a carrying stick and soaked with oil. The jars held the oil into which the torch was dipped before lighting. A torch without a jar of oil was as useless as a modern flashlight without a battery.”<sup>244</sup>

The bridegroom will make “his own way to the point where he is to be met. The light is to make for a grand arrival: the bridegroom will be illuminated as a focus of attention; this is his moment of glory as he is on his way to take his bride.”<sup>245</sup>

**bridegroom....** Earlier in a different context, Jesus had identified himself as the bridegroom, and of course, he is here doing so again.

*“And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.””* (Matthew 9:15, ESV)

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<sup>243</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 543–544.

<sup>244</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 948-949.

<sup>245</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 1004.

**meet**<sup>246</sup> .... This is a most interesting word. “The word *apántēsis* (ἀπάντησις) was used for the public welcome accorded to important visitors.”<sup>247</sup> It is used four times in the New Testament, two in this story. The sense in each case is to meet and then return with.

*“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.”* (Matthew 25:1, ESV)

*“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’”* (Matthew 25:6, ESV)

“The *apantēsis*, or “meeting,” “rendezvous” (25:6), often suggested going out to meet someone and forming his escort into the place where he would be honored.”<sup>248</sup> These two verses describe how the virgins escorted the bridegroom to the bride.

Let’s take a look at how Luke, in the Book of Acts, uses this word. Brothers from the church in Rome went to meet Paul.

*“And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. ... And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.”* (Acts 28:15–16, ESV)

The meeting involved *escorting* Paul back to Rome; this is the point of the word.

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<sup>246</sup> *meet* ἀπάντησις “...to meet coming from different directions. A meeting (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15). In 1 Thess. 4:17, the expression eis (unto) apántēsin (meeting) indicates that the Lord will be coming from one direction and we shall be coming from another to meet together in the air.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>247</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 64.

<sup>248</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 597.

On the last day, we will again meet Jesus. And that brings us to I Thessalonians 4, which is the purpose of my comments.

*“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17, ESV)*

If this word functions here like the other three examples, those caught up to meet Jesus in the air will then *immediately* return with him to the earth to reign with Christ in his new Jerusalem—*there are no seven years of tribulations first and then another return after the tribulation*. Dispensationalists teach that Jesus comes for his bride, and then seven years later, he returns with his bride to set up a millennium. In fact, in I Thessalonians 4, both actions take place at the same time. He returns for his bride and then immediately returns with his bride.

***Matthew 25:2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.***

***foolish, wise....*** The Bible commonly uses these categories to describe spiritual conditions. The themes of the wise and foolish are common to scripture. We see it used by Jesus in the summary of the Sermon on the Mount. The key idea is that wisdom is demonstrated in obedient action to Jesus’ teachings.

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” ... “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” (Matthew 7:25, 26, ESV)*

In a previous verse, we saw the same point. The wise man is faithful, acting in keeping with the master’s instructions.

*“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?” (Matthew 24:45, ESV)*

***Matthew 25:3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, Matthew 25:4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.***

## When Will These Things Be?

It turns out that five were foolish and disobedient to their call, they took no action to prepare, although they knew the bridegroom was coming. Even though talking the talk is good, they failed to walk the walk.

***Matthew 25:5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.***

As in the previous parable, it is the apparent inordinate passing of time that sets up the story. Although all slept, five had prepared for this contingency.

***Matthew 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'***

*"Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—" (Mark 13:35, ESV)*

***midnight....*** "The parable thus illustrates both the fact that the time of the *parousia* is unknown, and may not be as soon as people might expect, and also its sudden, unexpected nature when it does come, the middle of the night being the time when people are at their least alert."<sup>249</sup>

***meet***<sup>250</sup>.... To meet and return with. See Matthew 25:1.

***Matthew 25:7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.***

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<sup>249</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 949.

<sup>250</sup> *meet ἀπάντησις* "...to meet coming from different directions. A meeting (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15). In 1 Thess. 4:17, the expression eis (unto) apántēsin (meeting) indicates that the Lord will be coming from one direction and we shall be coming from another to meet together in the air." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

**all those virgins....** "...every last one sets out to respond to the call, which only heightens the tragedy of the development to follow."<sup>251</sup>

**Matthew 25:8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'**

It turns out that many are not prepared for the Lord's return.

**Matthew 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.'**

This must have been a bitter message to the foolish girls. Where would they find a dealer of lamp oil in the middle of the night?

"...the foresight and preparedness of the wise virgins cannot benefit the foolish virgins when the eschatological crisis dawns (vv. 8–9). Preparedness can neither be transferred nor shared."<sup>252</sup>

**Matthew 25:10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.**

**ready**<sup>253</sup>.... Why must one be **ready**? Because the time of the coming of the Son of Man cannot be known in advance.

"Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:44, ESV)

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<sup>251</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 1007.

<sup>252</sup> D. A. Carson, "*Matthew*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 513-514.

<sup>253</sup> *ready* ἑτοιμος "pertaining to a state of readiness—'ready, prepared.'" Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 682.

## When Will These Things Be?

The fact that some were ready or prepared was of no benefit to those who had not prepared.

**the door was shut.** “The closing of the door is another element in the story which seems out of place in the open hospitality and conviviality of a village wedding; late arrival is not normally an issue in oriental society, certainly not penalized in such a dramatic fashion. But this has become, like so many of the other parables, a story of insiders and outsiders, of the saved and the lost, and the closing of the door symbolizes that final division at the last judgment, as we have seen it in 13:30, 48; 21:31, 41; 22:8–10, 13.”<sup>254</sup>

“Because this parable concerns the consummation, the refusal to recognize or admit the foolish virgins (v. 12) must not be construed as a calloused rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the kingdom. Far from it: it is the rejection of those who, despite appearances, never made preparation for the coming of the kingdom.”<sup>255</sup>

**Matthew 25:11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’**

“The girls in the parable plead, “*open up for us.*” They have no lack of desire to be numbered among the guests. And they are there, on the spot. Presumably, they had been invited earlier, and they are sure that there must be a place for them. The door shut in their faces is mystifying. There must be a way for them to get in. So, they plead to the bridegroom.”<sup>256</sup>

“A mindless coziness with the Lord and feelings of warm devotion toward him (“Lord, Lord,” v. 11) are dangerous if we think they

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<sup>254</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 949-959.

<sup>255</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 514.

<sup>256</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 521.

substitute for obedience to Jesus' ethics...."<sup>257</sup> This is an interesting observation: "Superevangelical Christianity often teaches that a dramatic conversion will do the trick (just have a *lamp*, and you'll be all right) and that such an experience will so change a person that "moral" lessons on how to live a Christian life need not be learned. This same Christian teaching often scorns education, preparation, and even church and liturgy ("churchianity," "rites and ceremonies") as so many externals and thus as obstacles to true inward Christianity. Nothing is *essential* except a Christian experience—"once saved, always saved;" the lamp with its oil is life—forget any reserve oil."<sup>258</sup>

It would seem their faith was not a "blessed assurance" but a "cursed assurance." It is an assurance of salvation they should have never embraced. And from which we so often hear, "I'm spiritual, I'm just not religious." Which for the most part means, I'm spiritual, I'm just not Christian. And for such a person....

***Matthew 25:12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'***

"“I don't know you” was a Semitic idiom, used especially by rabbis who dismissed certain students, meaning “I don't want anything more to do with you” ”<sup>259</sup> The same thought was found earlier:

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

“But the point is simply that readiness, whatever form it takes, is not something that can be achieved by a last-minute adjustment. It depends on the long-term provision, and if that has been made, the

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<sup>257</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 544.

<sup>258</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 544–545.

<sup>259</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550.

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wise disciple can sleep secure in the knowledge that everything is ready.”<sup>260</sup> “One-shot Christianity is misleading and finally fatal. The *lamp oil* of experiential Christianity, without the *reserve oil* of disciplined Christianity—that is to say, an experience of Jesus without obedience to his teachings—betrays unbelief and will not find entrance into the end-time kingdom.”<sup>261</sup> “When we teach only Jesus’ mercies but not his judgments, we *disfigure* the gospel.”<sup>262</sup> But, the midnight cry will not leave the wise unprepared.

This might be a good time to note that the teachings of Liberals that all enter the kingdom by one means or another is in fact false. The kingdom is not *inclusive*; or as they say, “all religions lead to the same place.” Instead, it is *exclusive*; the kingdom is reserved to those who enter by faith in Jesus the Christ; but not to those who enter by *faith in faith*, whatever that is, but only to those who enter by faith in Jesus Christ.

*“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”* (John 10:9, ESV)

**Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

“The Christian life is not just the initial thrill of a conversion, nor is it the series of thrills in praise services with their wonderful music; the Christian life is often dog-day service to households, in season and out, with or without ecstasy, in the simple determination to give faithful and creative service to others, with the correct sense that *one day we will give an account....*”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 947.

<sup>261</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 546.

<sup>262</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550.

<sup>263</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI;

***the day nor the hour....*** This is the conclusion of the day/hour inclusio and, therefore, the end of a section (24:36-25:13). "This parable is a warning that the time of the *arrival of the bridegroom is unknown* and that speculation regarding the hour is pointless. The enormous amount of energy that in certain Christian circles is poured into such speculation is here declared misguided. For "*of that day or that hour, no one knows*" (Mk 13:32)."<sup>264</sup>

**Conclusion: It Will Be A Rather Ordinary Day  
(24:36-25:13)**

The day of Jesus' second coming will be much like his first coming. There is one word to describes that day — ordinary.

The sky was ordinary. An occasional gust stirred the leaves and chilled the air. The stars were diamonds sparkling on black velvet. Fleets of clouds floated in front of the moon.

It was a beautiful night — worth peeking out your bedroom window to admire — but not really an unusual one. No reason to expect a surprise. Nothing to keep a person awake. An ordinary night with an ordinary sky.

The sheep were ordinary. Some fat. Some scrawny. Some with barrel bellies. Some with twig legs. Common animals. No fleece made of gold. No history makers. No blue-ribbon winners. They were simply sheep — lumpy, sleeping silhouettes on a hillside.

And the shepherds. Peasants they were. Probably wearing all the clothes they owned. Smelling like sheep and looking just as woolly. They were conscientious, willing to spend the night with their flocks. But you won't find their staffs in a museum nor their writings in a library. No one asked their

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Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 550–551.

<sup>264</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 275.

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opinion on social justice or the application of the Torah.  
They were nameless and simple.<sup>265</sup>

And as Jesus teaches in the Olivet Discourse, so will it be on his final coming in human history: For ***the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:44).***

And notice that these verses on the coming of Christ in 24:36-25:13 incorporate *no cataclysmic end to human history*. It will be an ordinary day.

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<sup>265</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/max-lucado-the-ordinary-becomes-extraordinary-at-christmas>

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**Part Three – The Final Judgment – Matthew  
25:14-46**

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Earlier in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus instructed his disciples on the coming destruction of the temple:

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

In response, the disciples asked:

*“...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)*

The answers to the first two questions were set off by the inclusios:

*“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)*

Notice that there is a chiasm (X) in these two verses. The phrase, “*all these things*” comes first and third in these two verses, and the phrase “*this generation*” comes second and first in these two verses. This greatly strengthens the power of the inclusio making this section stand out as a tightly knit pericope. The point? There is no way you can run the material in this section into the next as if they are one unit. The inclusos and the chiasm in the inclusos make that impossible.

Jesus answered the first two questions in 24:1-24:35—but not the question “*and of the end of the age,*” that was the message of Matthew 24:36 –25:13. That section was set off with another inclusio “*day and hour*” and “*no one knows*” which has its own reversed chiasm (X). Clearly, these are two unique teaching units.

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*“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)

Again, this technique identifies a hard break in the storyline.

With the completion of these two inclusions,

*“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)

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*“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)

we have Jesus’ teachings on the final judgment. Here, at 25:14, there is a new focus—the material from 25:14 till the end of the chapter, 25:46, deals with two aspects of the final judgment. The first on the talents deal with the obligations of believers in the interim between Jesus’ first and last coming (25:24-30). The second deals with the final judging of the nations (25:31-46).

In the previous section, the theme was the unexpected return of Jesus, which received particular stress with the words “*know*” and “*day and hour*.”

“Here... the attention of the reader is directed not to the surprise of his sudden return but more directly to *the servants’ conduct during*

*the time he has been away.*<sup>266</sup> At this point, the master “expects the watchfulness of the servants to manifest itself during the master’s absence, not only in preparedness and performance of duty, even if there is a long delay, but in an improvement of the allotted “talents” till the day of reckoning.”<sup>267</sup>

Luke also records this parable of the talents noting that Jesus spoke this material saying...

*“... because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”* (Luke 19:11, ESV).

But it wasn’t, and that is the *why* of this parable. It was “... *after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*” (Matthew 25:19, ESV). The parable of the talents teaches that the kingdom will *not* appear immediately but after *a long time*.

But the disciples are still confused and again after his resurrection address the restoration of the kingdom saying...

*“So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*” (Acts 1:6, ESV)

But the answer does not change, Jesus responds saying...

*“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”* (Acts 1:7, ESV)

It is normal for us, and them, to want to know when Jesus is going to return, but Jesus made it clear on both occasions that it is “*not for you to know times or seasons.*” And to make it more transparent yet, Jesus says in Matthew, “*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*” (Matthew 25:13, ESV). What could be clearer? “*It*

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<sup>266</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (vol. 33B; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 732–733.

<sup>267</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 515.

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*is not for you to know times or seasons*" (Acts 1:7), and "*for you know neither the day nor the hour*" (Matthew 25:13). You would think that these two statements would settle it and that the intent of the parable of the talents would be fully embraced. And what is the purpose of the parable? To make this point...

*"Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them."* (Matthew 25:19, ESV)

That's it, that's what he wanted us to know, "*after a long time the master of those servants came....*" So, how is it even possible that we act in such a defiant fashion and virtually demand to know "*times and seasons*" when he has made it so very clear "*it is not for you to know*"?

This new parable in 25:14 is about the end of the world and the judgments to follow; it provides *no* information on "*times and seasons*."

### ***Judgment of Israel: The Talents - Matthew 25:14–30***

#### **Instructions for Service (Matthew 25:14-18)**

***Matthew 25:14 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.***

***For***<sup>268</sup>.... The word "*for*" expresses the reason for what was just said in 25:13. "*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour for "it will be like a man...."*

Luke tells us why he went on this journey.

*"He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return." (Luke 19:12, ESV)*

Daniel gives us details about the event.

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<sup>268</sup> *for* γάρ "a causative particle standing always after one or more words in a clause and expressing the reason for what has been before, affirmed or implied." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

*"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)*

He has gone, but he will return.

***Matthew 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.***

***talents***<sup>269</sup>.... In silver, one talent would be about 16 years of wages for an unskilled worker, or about \$400,000.

"Modern English uses the word "talent" for skills and mental powers God has entrusted to men...."<sup>270</sup> And this is an excellent way of how we might actually view these talents. But at the same time, let's not forget that "few activities index true or false faith as clearly as the use of money."<sup>271</sup> So, if we were to limit the parable to one's use of the money God gives them, it would be a most interesting indicator of one's love for God.

***he gave five talents, to another two, to another one....*** These various amounts are descriptive of the reality of human life. Some

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<sup>269</sup> *talents* *τάλαντον* "...a talent of money (of silver valued at c 6,000 day's wage; gold 180,000 day's wages); ... a measure of weight (varying from about 57 to 80 lbs.). In any case, vast, rhetorical, hyperbolic amounts of money are meant (Mt 18:24; 25:15)." James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>270</sup> D. A. Carson, "*Matthew*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 516.

<sup>271</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 554.

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are born into great wealth or find an unexpected opportunity to acquire it. Some are born with great intellect, while others are not. Some are gifted with unique abilities, but many are not. But each, no matter what their state, is expected to do *something* with what God has given him. So, most believe that talents “represent not the natural gifts and aptitudes which everyone has, but the specific privileges and opportunities of the kingdom of heaven and the responsibilities they entail.”<sup>272</sup>

In summary, we have three possibilities as to what talents address: 1) money, 2) gifts, and 3) opportunities. I think we should view all three as from God and all to which we must give account.

***to each according to his ability....*** Their responsibility did not exceed their gifts. What they were asked to do, they were capable of doing.

***Then he went away....*** Jesus would be referencing his own departure from this world for an undetermined amount of time.

Some have noted that “before departing the Master *gave no instructions* on what to do with the Talents, as though he was leaving *that* to the freedom and creativity of the recipients.”<sup>273</sup> And to some degree, this is true but, did God not leave instructions on how to use money? In fact, the scripture is filled with instructions and insight into the use of wealth.

To these verses, add those that address the dangers of debt, the benefits of savings, and our responsibility to care for the poor. So, with all this in mind, let’s not move too quickly from the subject of money to gifts and opportunities but instead consider all these as responsibilities from God.

***Matthew 25:16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.***

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<sup>272</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 951.

<sup>273</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 554.

**received....** Soon we will read about the work of the servants, but we must not forget that grace precedes work. Before they could do anything of value, they needed to **receive** from the hand of God.

**at once....** “The first slave’s eagerness—he “went straight off and...” is a model for enthusiastic discipleship.”<sup>274</sup> It is an example for us to follow as well; serve with enthusiasm, not with grumpiness or dismay. It is also the opposite response of those who would use the Lord’s coming return as an excuse for laziness: “Why get involved with the world’s messes, after all, the Lord is coming soon.” Or “don’t worry about polishing brass on a sinking ship.” And this is followed by the ubiquitous, “the Lord is coming soon.” Ignorant excuses for the lazy.

**Matthew 25:17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.**

Like his colleague, he also made 100% on his talents. It no doubt took him many years to achieve this return but, this is what the parable is about, for it was after “*a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*” (Matthew 15:19). “Waiting for the Lord is not for Matthew a fact of religious *inwardness* or of a unique fervor or even of prayer; it is *an active engagement* that mobilizes the believer in the invitation to risky initiatives.”<sup>275</sup> Proclaiming the gospel in a world that hates Jesus is risky.

**Matthew 25:18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.**

“...clearly, there was a risk involved, which their other colleague was unwilling to face. No doubt, he would have justified his action as

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<sup>274</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 954.

<sup>275</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 555.

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prudent rather than cowardly....”<sup>276</sup> Basically, he didn’t want to bother with the task to which he was assigned. He had other plans for his life; serving the master was not high on the list. Let’s not forget that vacation home, his new RV and the boat, don’t forget the boat! Was any of this wrong? Only if it got in the way of his eternal calling—and it did.

The faithful servants **went**, **traded**, and **made** (25:16). But the lazy servant....

**went, dug, and hid....** This statement may have been directed to the Qumran community of Jesus’ day that went away into the desert, dug caves in the hills, and hid from the world. If so, it reminds us that the monastic life of withdrawal from the world is not God’s intent for his Church. In our era, there is something very much like this in those that do a holy huddle, refuse to polish brass on a sinking ship (become engaged with our culture), and quietly wait for a secret rapture to take us out of this mess. The point? God has called his people to participate in this fallen world and proclaim the gospel, not hide from the world in pseudo-perfect religious communities.

## The Settling of Accounts (Matthew 25:19-29)

**Matthew 25:19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.**

**after a long time....** Notice, at this point, a soon return is not anticipated. We saw the soon return dealt with in 24:1-24:35. But now we are in a period of long delay.

*“But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’” (Matthew 24:48, ESV)*

*“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.” (Matthew 25:5, ESV)*

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<sup>276</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 954.

A significant part of the story is that the Lord's final coming in history is to be **after a long time**. This is an important point for it is in stark contrast to the judgment on Jerusalem in the lifetime of Jesus' audience. Notice the building tension in that earlier material:

*"...but the end is not yet." (Matthew 24:6, ESV)*

*"...the beginning of the birth pains." (Matthew 24:8, ESV)*

*"...you know that summer is near." (Matthew 24:32, ESV)*

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

This helps clarify the passage, the first part (24:1-24:35) addresses the soon judgment coming of Jesus on Jerusalem and his Temple, the rest (24:36-25:46) addresses a distant coming of Jesus at the end of the ages.

**settled accounts....** This is a picture of activities at the time of the final judgment at the end of the world. God will settle accounts with each and every one of us!

**Matthew 25:20** *And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'*

A picture of faithfulness.

**Matthew 25:21** *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

**Well done....** "The single great goal of Christians can be to hear their Lord's "Wonderful!" [well done] spoken to their life work at the Judgment."<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 557.

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**faithful....** Faithfulness is the common denominator in all the judgment parables.

***I will set you over much....*** “The reward of fulfilled responsibility is *greater* responsibility! There will be a call up a corporate ladder—a great promotion—that will be eternal.”<sup>278</sup> “Heavenly rewards are not beds of rest; they are posts of duty.”<sup>279</sup>

“...here one encounters the principle that only those proved in small leadership positions would be prepared for bigger ones.”<sup>280</sup>

***Matthew 25:22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’***

Another faithful report.

***Matthew 25:23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’***

“Thus, even if our work is on a lower level than others in this life, that is not important. Important is what we did with what we received. ... in service it is quality, not quantity... that exults in Judgment.”<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558.

<sup>279</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558.

<sup>280</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 600.

<sup>281</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 558–559.

***I will set you over much....*** One should “envisage heaven as a state not of indolent pleasure but of active cooperation with the purpose of God, as well as enjoyment of his favor....”<sup>282</sup>

***Enter into the joy of your master.*** It is the joy that Jesus looked forward to sharing with the right and faithful, those that glorify God and fully enjoy him forever.

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV)

***Matthew 25:24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,***

***Master or Lord....*** The servant considered himself a Christian; Jesus was his Lord.

***hard***<sup>283</sup>.... The Greek word is *sklēρός*, as in *arterio[sclerosis]* or hardening of the arteries. The wicked man calls Jesus hard, but Jesus says otherwise:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”” (Matthew 11:29–30, ESV)

The man is a liar. When faced with sin and irresponsible behavior, it is second nature for the lost to blame God (“I didn’t ask to be born” “why did you make me this way?”) instead of taking responsibility for one’s own behavior.

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<sup>282</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 955.

<sup>283</sup> *hard* σκληρός “Dried up, dry, hard, stiff; of the voice or sounds as hoarse or harsh; of things as hard, tough, not soft.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

**reaping where you did not sow....** This person continues the defense of laziness by slandering the master and practically speaking, calling him a thief.

**Matthew 25:25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.**

**I was afraid....** In the parable of the two servants, the first servant was unconcerned about his master's return (24:45–51), he “*begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards*” (24:49). In this parable, the servant seems *too frightened* (25:14-30) “*I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground*” (25:25).

He concludes by making a virtue of his sin of indifference to the master's instructions by magnanimously giving back the unused talent. “He felt that his preservation of the talent was something for which he should receive credit.”<sup>284</sup> Fear he possessed, love he didn't.

*“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”* (1 John 4:18, ESV)

**Matthew 25:26 But his master answered him, You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?**

**wicked or evil and slothful**<sup>285</sup> or **lazy....** The master is quick to identify the real factors lying behind his behavior; he wasn't prudent; he was simply *evil and lazy*.

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<sup>284</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 631.

<sup>285</sup> *slothful* ὀκνηρός “pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition—‘lazy, lacking in ambition.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 768.

**Matthew 25:27** *Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.*

**invested my money....** This was “a procedure that he could have undertaken with safety and no great personal exertion.”<sup>286</sup> But he was too lazy to do even that.

**bankers....** “... (the people who sit at tables). These were people who changed money from one currency to another, charging a fee for the service. They also seem to have loaned money at interest... It is from such activities that modern banking evolved, hence, the translation.”<sup>287</sup>

“Jesus is saying that the service he expected from his servant was *light, not hard*; just don’t *bury* your talent....”<sup>288</sup>

**Matthew 25:28** *So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.*

**take the talent from him....** The opportunity of faithful service has passed. “The man has had the money for quite some time and has shown that he has no intention of making any use of it.”<sup>289</sup>

““Use it or lose it.” Unused muscles atrophy, unused talents damn, unfruitful trees are felled for the fire (3:10; 7:19).”<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 631.

<sup>287</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 633.

<sup>288</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 562.

<sup>289</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 632.

<sup>290</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 562.

**give it to him who has the ten talents.** “That man has shown that he knows how to use money profitably. He will make the best use of it, and therefore it should be left with him.”<sup>291</sup>

*“For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Matthew 13:12, ESV)*

**Matthew 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.**

Jesus “is laying down a principle of the spiritual life, a principle of great importance. Anyone who has a talent (using the word in the modern sense) of any kind and fails to use it, by that very fact forfeits it. By contrast, anyone who has a talent and uses it to the full finds that that talent develops and grows. This is a law of the spiritual life, and we neglect it at our peril.”<sup>292</sup>

### **The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:30)**

**Matthew 25:30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’**

At this point, our passage takes an unexpected turn. It is common in this study to view the talents as 1) money, 2) gifts, and 3) opportunities to be used by believers in God’s service. But now it becomes clear that Jesus is not merely calling believers to live the most productive lives possible; he is warning all people to turn in repentance and faith. It is only in God that our lives become something other than **worthless** and **useless**. And without God, that is what we prove to be—for eternity.

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<sup>291</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 632.

<sup>292</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 632.

**worthless** or **useless**<sup>293</sup>.... Jesus uses two adjectives to describe the one-talented servant: first, “shiftless” in v. 26, and now “useless” in v. 30.

**outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** Notwithstanding this verse and many others like it, Pope Francis recently said, “but those who do not repent and cannot, therefore, be forgiven disappear... There is no hell; there is the disappearance of sinful souls.”<sup>294</sup> He deceives the lost, comforting them in their sin. He is a wolf in sheep’s clothing; he knows little of Christianity.

*“...while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*” (Matthew 8:12, ESV)

“Instead of eternity in the lighted banquet, persons whose preoccupation in life was self-pleasing will find themselves out in the dark, feeling the regrets of lost opportunities, misspent chances, stupid choices forever. Jesus does not end this parable grimly from a macabre pleasure in telling horror stories—Jesus *loves* human beings and wants to save them from messed-up lives and eternities, and that’s why he tells his scary stories.”<sup>295</sup>

## **Judgment of the Gentiles: Sheep and Goats – Matthew 25:31–46**

### **The Coming Judgment (Matthew 25:31-33)**

This is Jesus’ last teaching unit before His passion; it, therefore, carries great weight.

We concluded Matthew 25:30 reading,

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<sup>293</sup> *worthless* ἀχρεῖος “...pertaining to not being useful—‘useless, not useful, worthless.”” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>294</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/03/30/vatican-tamps-down-report-that-pope-francis-denies-existence-hell.html>

<sup>295</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 563.

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

Jesus will now give greater detail about that terrible event. “This depiction of the Last Judgment is especially important because it is the final story in Jesus’ public teaching ministry. This is the teaching Matthew wants to be imprinted on readers’ consciences as Jesus’ final teaching.”<sup>296</sup>

**Matthew 25:31** *“[Now] When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.*

**[Now]**<sup>297</sup> *When....* This phrase **now when** refers us back to verse 30. “*And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” (Matthew 25:30, ESV). Jesus will now give greater detail about that event.

**comes....** The Greek word is (ἐρχομαι) érchomai not (παρουσία) parousía. This is another illustration of the interchangeability of these two words.

**in his glory....** “Jesus’ whole earthly life had been one of lowliness and service; now he looks forward to a coming that will be strikingly different. He does not define *in his glory*, but clearly, he means that when he returns at the end of this age, he will come in majesty and splendor.”<sup>298</sup> As he stated earlier:

*“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.”* (Matthew 16:27, ESV)

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<sup>296</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 563.

<sup>297</sup> ὅέ, now, but, and.

<sup>298</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 635.

**all the angels....** “All? The whole heavenly world will also be present at this spectacle—world history’s consummation, examination, and judgment.”<sup>299</sup> No one will miss this event.

“.... *The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.*” (Matthew 13:39, 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)

**glorious throne....** Jesus will, from this throne, judge the nations. Only God could do such a thing! “...there can be no doubt that our text transfers the authority of *God* to the coming Son of Man, since glory, angels, and throne are all God’s exclusive accouterments; yet here they are emphatically the Son of Man’s....”<sup>300</sup>

Jesus mentioned this glorious throne previously.

“*Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world [in the regeneration], 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)

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus identifies this as occurring “*in the new world.*”<sup>301</sup> It is a re-genesis of the world.

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<sup>299</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 566.

<sup>300</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 565.

<sup>301</sup> παλιγγενεσία *paliggenesía* “It is often translated regeneration, and in fact, that is a good translation. It consists of two words, the “noun from *pálin*... again, and *genesis*, generation, nation. Regeneration, restoration, renovation, rebirth.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

## When Will These Things Be?

The “**glorious throne**” of Matthew 19:28 and 25:31 occurs when the old world is destroyed and replaced by *the new world*. *This indeed is an end of the world scene, not an AD 70 scene.*

**Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**

**Before him....** It is before Him that all must give an account, not before Buddha, or Mohammad or Vishnu, or as some hope, no one at all, but before Him, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

*“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12, ESV)*

**all the nations....** Not only all the angels, but every human being that has ever lived will be there.

*“...and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,” (Isaiah 66:18, ESV)*

Jesus addressed the *judgment on Israel* in Matthew 23:36-24:35 in A.D. 70. But now we are at the last judgment, one in which *all the nations of the earth* will be judged for the last time—not just Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

**he will separate....** “**He**,” the one who does the separating and judging is Jesus. Jesus is the final judge of the world. This is not a new revelation, Jesus has spoken of this day from his first significant discourse, the Sermon on the Mount to his last one, the Olivet Discourse.

*“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)*

Also, in the parable of the net Jesus addressed the same event saying:

*"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 13:49–50, ESV)

In these passages, we have a reminder that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity, and as such the judge of all humanity. "...the central biblical and Jewish role of eschatological judge that Jesus here assumes normally belongs to God himself...."<sup>302</sup>

**he will separate people....** The great separation on the last day is both denied and dreaded by a lost world. But, at that time, the lie that we are all children of God will be exposed. Although we are all the creation of God, only the regenerate, the sheep, are the children of God.

*"Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."* (John 5:28–29, ESV)

**Matthew 25:33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.**

**sheep, goats....** "...of the two, *the sheep* were prized the more highly. The two groups of animals would graze together, but in due course, *the shepherd* would separate them out...."<sup>303</sup>

"As Palestinian shepherds separated sheep from goats into separate enclosures at night, so the Shepherd Son of Man will separate the

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<sup>302</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 602.

<sup>303</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 636.

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unrighteous and the righteous into separate eternities at the Judgment....”<sup>304</sup>

**right, left....** “...the right-hand side was generally seen as the favored side; for example, to be at the ruler’s right hand was to be in the place of highest honor the ruler could give. The *left* was thought of as the side of ill omen...so it is the appropriate place for the less favored *goats*.”<sup>305</sup>

### The Criteria for Judgment (Matthew 25:34-40)

**Matthew 25:34** *Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

**King....** This is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus uses this term to identify himself, although he does approve of others using it of him.

*“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”* (Luke 19:38, ESV)

It is, of course, also used in the Book of Revelation to refer to Jesus.

*“They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”* (Revelation 17:14, ESV)

*“On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”* (Revelation 19:16, ESV)

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<sup>304</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 567.

<sup>305</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 636.

**inherit....** “Something that is inherited comes to one as a gift, not as the result of one’s own earnings....”<sup>306</sup> “...*the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6:23, ESV)

**kingdom....** “What they are to inherit is *the kingdom*, which signifies a sure and accepted place in the kingdom of God....”<sup>307</sup>

John the Baptist preached:

*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matthew 3:2, ESV)

Jesus preached:

*“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.””* (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

He taught us to pray:

*“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10, ESV)

And now, in this verse, it comes in its fullness.

**prepared for you from the foundation of the world.** “This strong expression brings out the truth that this has always been in the plan of God. Jesus is not speaking of some afterthought, but of what God had always planned to bring about, and that will come to its consummation at the end of this age.”<sup>308</sup>

“Some interpret the passage as though those on the King’s right merited their salvation by their good works, but here we have the

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<sup>306</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 636.

<sup>307</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 637.

<sup>308</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 637.

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kingdom prepared for them by God before ever they were born. We should not miss the implication that they are God's elect."<sup>309</sup>

*"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,"*  
(Ephesians 1:4–5, NKJV)

Because the kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world, it could not be based on merit; no one was alive to merit anything at that point. It was through the election of God by grace through faith.

***Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,***

***Matthew 25:36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'***

These six acts of mercy are not acts that must be done to secure salvation but acts that demonstrate the good works expected of the child of God—one who already possesses salvation.

"Four times, this list is repeated in this and the following verses (it is clearly meant to be remembered as a guide to practical discipleship...)." <sup>310</sup> Apparently, we are expected to provide for those who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. Although these behaviors are not limited to caring for the Christian community, *it is primarily directed to them*. There are practical limits to what we can do in the world, but those limits are reached outside the family of faith, not within it. We must be able to depend on each other.

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<sup>309</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 637.

<sup>310</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 637.

**hungry....** To a person overweight to be hungry means to crave *more* food. Jesus uses it here of those that are starving and need *some* food just to live. It may be that the world will return to these conditions. We must be ready to fulfill this mission if it does and it may be wise to prepare *now* for that time as did Joseph in Egypt.

**thirsty....** In our day, this refers to finding a convenience store to stop at to buy a soft drink. But, in this era and in this arid land, clean, safe water was the exception. Thirst even surpasses hunger in importance, for a person can only live a few days without it. Guaranteeing safe water for ourselves is not something we give much thought to. We turn the handle, and out it comes. In our country, even the poor have an abundance of water fountains from which to drink. But the day may come when the water stops. Again, preparing now to ensure that the flow does not stop would be wise.

**strangers....** In every age, strangers have been dangerous. They are today, as well. But the early church found themselves persecuted from town to town, and in fleeing to a new community, they were strangers even to the church in that town.

*“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)

*“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”*  
(Acts 8:1, ESV)

Clearly, Jesus expected the church to step up, identify those believers who were in need and take them into their own homes—there were no hotels or boarding houses! We must be prepared to exercise radical hospitality.

**naked....** Throughout the centuries, many were stripped naked and beat, others had their goods stolen by anti-Christian mobs, and others were forced to flee without adequate clothing. Believers are required to step up and provide clothing for them. Earlier we read:

## When Will These Things Be?

*“and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.” (Matthew 24:18, ESV)*

When you flee, you generally can take very little with you.

**sick....** We all experience sickness. But it is especially dangerous when fleeing without food and clothing from an enraged mob. So, we must provide medical care for these members of the family of God.

**in prison....** Christians over the centuries have been imprisoned for no other reason than that they were Christians.

*“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1–2, ESV)*

And the author of Hebrews commends the compassion the church expressed to those in prison.

*“For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” (Hebrews 10:34, ESV)*

*“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” (Hebrews 13:3, ESV)*

**you came to me....** There is more here than just a friendly visit to a believer in jail; if family and friends did not visit a person in jail and provide food, clothing, and medical care, they would likely die; the Romans would not do this for prisoners. And very often the wife and children would suffer terribly as well, they had no breadwinner to care for them. They needed help too.

By any chance, are you looking for ways to minister for Jesus Christ? Jesus suggests six, and no seminary degree is required!

I was hungry, and you gave Me food;

I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink;  
I was a stranger, and you took Me in;  
I was naked, and you clothed Me;  
I was sick, and you visited Me;  
I was in prison, and you came to Me.

The Church has, through the ages, attempted and still attempts to do these very things. It has provided soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters, orphanages, clothing closets, hospitals, and prison ministries. No other “religion” in the world has done such things—except as instructed by the example of Christians.

Red Cross, Goodwill Industries, Salvation Army, Downtown Missions, Christian Hospitals, Samaritan’s Purse, women’s shelters, legal services to Christian ministries, and a multitude more were founded by Christians to serve Christ. And may we add, “I was a fetus, and you brought me to term, I was conceived, and you brought me to birth?”<sup>311</sup> Although many of these organizations are now Christian in name only. Still, these make the point, Christians have for millennia understood that they are to live out this passage in practical ways.

***Matthew 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’***

***righteous***<sup>312</sup>.... The righteous are the children of God. “...the righteous” (a favorite word of Matthew’s...are understandably astonished at what Jesus has just said to them. They have taken it quite literally but remember no circumstance in which they ministered to Jesus in these ways....”<sup>313</sup> But Jesus says they did so in caring for others.

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<sup>311</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 571.

<sup>312</sup> *righteous* *δίκαιος* “...being in accordance with God’s compelling standards....” James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>313</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 744.

**Matthew 25:38** *And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?*

**Matthew 25:39** *And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’*

**Matthew 25:40** *And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

**Truly, I say to you....** With this phrase, Jesus is pointing out *the central point of this lesson*. “This is the heart of this section, the “moral of the story.”<sup>314</sup>

**one of the least of these....** Theological liberals take passages like this and interpret them to mean that God determines our salvation based on our good works to mankind. This, of course, is not the intent of the passage at all. The focus of this service is by Christians (the righteous, 25:37) to Christians (brothers, 25:40). It is not done to gain salvation but is done because one is already a Christian serving Jesus and his disciples, our brothers and sisters in the faith. Indeed, it should be said that such loving attention is most appropriate to all, believers or not. But the focus of the passage is to help the persecuted Church. “Jesus identifies himself with the fate of his followers and makes compassion for them, equivalent to compassion for himself....”<sup>315</sup>

**my brothers....** Jesus’ primary focus was on caring for the community of faith. “That the “siblings” are here “disciples” is the majority view in church history and among contemporary New Testament scholars....”<sup>316</sup> But we are not limited to that.

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<sup>314</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937.

<sup>315</sup> D. A. Carson, “*Matthew*,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 520.

<sup>316</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 606.

*“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10, ESV)*

“...the righteous are told that to the extent that they did these things ... “for one of the least of these, my brothers,” they had in effect done them for Jesus himself.”<sup>317</sup> “So Jesus’ message is that the world will be judged on the basis of how it treats those “little people” whom God is sending to it....”<sup>318</sup> That means how it treats Christians.

Do you remember how Jesus began his public ministry?

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”  
(Matthew 5:7, ESV)*

He now ends it in the same way—showing mercy. Mercy enveloped his earthly ministry. Should we learn something from this?

### **The Final Judgment (Matthew 25:41-46)**

***Matthew 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’***

“The words spoken to those on the left are the mirror image of those spoken in v. 34 to the “righteous:” “go away” instead of “come,” “cursed” instead of “blessed,” “eternal fire” instead of kingship, and a fate prepared in advance, though in this case not specifically for “you” but for the devil and his angels, whose lot the unrighteous are to share.”<sup>319</sup>

***eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*** Interestingly, “the idea that the lake of fire was seemingly intended or created for the devil and his angels has no apparent precedent in either the Old

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<sup>317</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 744.

<sup>318</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937.

<sup>319</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 965.

or New Testament.”<sup>320</sup> Then where did it come from? “The lake of fire is an excellent example of how New Testament writers on occasion get their theology from 1 Enoch and other Enochian texts. While the Old Testament has no account of angels being cast into the lake of fire, or that their destiny is such, 1 Enoch does.”<sup>321</sup> From this influential although uninspired book we read:

<sup>1</sup> And I came to an empty place. <sup>2</sup> And I saw (there) neither a heaven above nor an earth below, but a chaotic and terrible place. <sup>3</sup> And there I saw seven stars of heaven bound together in it, like great mountains, and burning with fire. <sup>4</sup> At that moment I said, “For which sin are they bound, and for what reason were they cast in here.”

<sup>5</sup> Then one of the holy angels, Uriel, who was with me, guiding me, spoke to me and said to me, “Enoch, for what reason are you asking and for what reason do you question and exhibit eagerness?”

<sup>6</sup> These are among the stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandments of the Lord and are bound in this place until the completion of ten million years, (according) to the number of their sins.” <sup>7</sup> I then proceeded from that area to another place which is even more terrible: a great fire that was burning and flaming; the place had a cleavage (extended) to the last sea, pouring out great pillars of fire; neither its extent nor its magnitude could I see nor was I able to estimate. <sup>8</sup> At that moment, what a terrible opening is this place and a pain to look at! <sup>9</sup> Then Ura’el, (one) of the holy angels who was with me, responded and said to me, “Enoch, why are you afraid like this?” (I answered and said), <sup>10</sup> “I am frightened because of this terrible place and the spectacle of this painful thing.” And he said unto me, **“This place is the prison house of the angels; they are detained here forever.”**<sup>322</sup>

A fire that burns forever.

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<sup>320</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & The Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 178.

<sup>321</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & The Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 178.

<sup>322</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 24.

*“and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10, ESV)*

*“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:15, ESV)*

“The Watchers, bound in the Abyss until the end of days, are released and then recaptured to be thrown into the lake of fire. Readers familiar with the Enochian material on the lake of fire know that some Enochian texts single out the leader of the Watchers (who goes by various names: Asael, Azazel, Shemhazah) for special mention in these judgment texts (e.g., 1 Enoch 10:4–6). This is a very close parallel to New Testament statements and, in particular, the scene of Satan’s judgment in Revelation 20:7–10.”<sup>323</sup>

“While the kingdom was “prepared” by God from creation (v. 34), now “eternal fire ... is prepared” ... for the sinners.”<sup>324</sup>

***Matthew 25:42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, Matthew 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’***

“As v. 41 negates v. 34, so these are the negative counterparts to vv. 35–36. The same six items are here detailing what the nations refused to do for Jesus’ followers. One could break these into two categories: acts of mercy for physical needs (hungry, thirsty, ill), and acts of charity toward social deprivation (stranger, naked, in prison). The unrighteous are unwilling to help in any way and so are condemned for this.”<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & The Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 180.

<sup>324</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 937–938.

<sup>325</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 938.

***Matthew 25:44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'***

Jesus said something familiar in the Sermon on the Mount.

*"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)*

**Lord....** Notice that these surprised individuals address Jesus as Lord. At this critical point, they want to acknowledge Jesus as Lord publicly. This is a warning to all that live their lives far from the standard of God's word while glibly calling themselves Christians—and to prove it, wear a little cross around their neck! The lordship of Christ is demonstrated in obedience to his word, not in empty words and bling.

***Matthew 25:45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'***

Their lack of Christian works testified to their lack of a Christian faith.

From this, we draw three conclusions, "(1) The sheep and the goats are not surprised at the judgment rendered but at the basis of it: the way they have treated Jesus. (2) This is not a works-righteousness—the actions reflected the heart attitude behind them. (3) The test here eliminates "the possibility of hypocrisy" in that the actions of each group have demonstrated the true condition of their hearts."<sup>326</sup>

***Matthew 25:46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."***

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<sup>326</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 938.

“Jesus rounds it all off by telling his hearers what the eternal destiny of each of the two groups will be.”<sup>327</sup>

**eternal punishment....** This teaching is almost universally rejected—even by some Christians.

*“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”* (Daniel 12:2, ESV)

*“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”* (Matthew 25:41, ESV)

*“and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Revelation 20:10, ESV)

**eternal life....** This is the hope of the faithful, living to the fullest and forever.

*“and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”* (John 5:29, ESV)

*“so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 5:21, ESV)

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23, ESV)

There are those that do not believe in eternal punishment, that is—eternal damnation in a lake of fire. However, it is important to note that if there is no eternal punishment, then there is no reason to believe in eternal life either; they are spoken of as a unit.

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<sup>327</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 641.

When Will These Things Be?

This is Jesus' last public discourse in Matthew, the last of his communal instructions for our consideration.

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### ***The Prophetic Flow of Scriptures***

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One major problem in understanding prophecy in the Bible is the confusion as to what goes where in the prophetic outline. In any given passage, we are confronted with the problem of grasping into what part of the prophetic panorama this particular passage properly fits. So, let's take a look at the big prophetic picture and see where the Olivet Discourse fits and what it contributes to the whole.

Three major passages in the Bible contribute to this big picture. Each passage conveys part of the total. These three major scriptural passages are 1) the Book of Daniel, 2) the Olivet Discourse, and 3) the Book of Revelation. Although other Old and New Testament passages contribute to this message as well.

From the Covenant of Redemption in eternity past to the Covenant of Creation, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and finally the New Covenant, God is both creating his Kingdom on earth and maturing it to His ultimate ends. From creation to consummation, God's redemptive plan is shared with his people *through prophecy*. What he began in the garden, he will finish in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

### ***The Book of Daniel***

At one point, however, it did appear that God was done with his work of redemption. At one point, the failure of his people in Israel was so egregious that he cast them out of the promised land of Israel into a foreign land of false gods. Had God disinherited his people; was he done with them; was there now no hope for Israel?

Through the Book of Daniel, God answers these questions and assures Israel that even now in this foreign land, God is with them and will bring his purposes, defined and promised in his covenants, to a conclusion. "The prophecy of Daniel gave God's people comfort during three great events in the following centuries:

1. The captivity in Babylon
2. The invasion of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes

3. The coming of the Messiah during the occupation by the Roman Empire and the resulting destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.”<sup>328</sup>

The following summary of Daniel’s dreams is most helpful.

“The visions move from general to specific. They point to several key events in the future history of the Jews: the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and its restoration from 167 to 165 BC; the exact time of the coming of the Messiah in AD 27; Nero’s persecution from AD 64 to 68; and the Roman-Jewish War from AD 67 to 70.

The First Vision is a dream of the king that is interpreted by Daniel.  
.... The timeline reads as follows:

**FIRST VISION** — Daniel 2 — 603 BC in the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Daniel interprets the king’s dream. The dream described four kingdoms that would rule over a vast empire. Note that the dates are from the perspective of these empires’ domination over Judah/Judea.

Babylonian-Chaldean Empire ..... from 605 to 539 BC  
Medo-Persian Empire ..... from 539 to 330 BC  
Macedonia-Greece .....from 330 to 64 BC  
Roman Empire ..... from 64 BC to AD 70

**SECOND VISION** — Daniel 7 —555 BC in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus and successor of Nebuchadnezzar. This is Daniel’s dream. The interpretation by angels is part of the dream. The four kingdoms are described in more detail and special attention is given by Daniel to the fourth kingdom which has ten kings.

Babylonian-Chaldean Empire ..... from 605 to 539 BC  
Medo-Persian Empire ..... from 539 to 330 BC  
Macedonia-Greece ..... from 330 to 64 BC  
Roman Empire ..... from 64 BC to AD 70

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<sup>328</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 47.

**THIRD VISION** — Daniel 8 — 553 BC in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar.

This vision of Daniel is interpreted by two angels. It describes the Medo-Persian Empire; the conquest of the world by Alexander the Great; the Seleucid and Ptolemaic succession; and the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanies in Syria.

Medo-Persian Empire .....	from 539 to 330 BC
Alexander's invasions .....	from 330 to 323 BC
Seleucids Rule Syria .....	from 323 to 167 BC
Antiochus Epiphanes .....	from 167 to 164 BC

**FOURTH VISION** — Daniel 9 — 539 BC in the first year of Darius, king of the Medes. The angel Gabriel appears to Daniel while he was fasting and inquiring of God the meaning of Jeremiah's "seventy years." Later the Messiah, the "Son of Man," appears. The vision describes the 483 year time period from the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, in 457 BC, when by his commandment Ezra began the work of completing the restoration of the Temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 7) – to the baptism of Jesus Christ in AD 27 when He first began to preach and execute the office of the Messiah.

Medo-Persian Empire .....	from .....	457 BC
Roman Empire .....	to .....	AD 27
A Total of .....		483 years

**FIFTH VISION** — Daniel 10,11,12 — 535 BC in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia.

In chapter 10, an angel came to Daniel while he was fasting for three weeks. The angel shows Daniel the wars and succession of kings in the Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires (Daniel 11) and the period of the coming of Messiah to the reign of Vespasian and the Great Tribulation from AD 67 to 70 (Daniel 12).

**Chapter 10-11**

Medo-Persian Empire .....	from 539 to 330 BC
Macedonia-Greece .....	from 330 to 64 BC
Roman Empire .....	from 64 BC to AD 70
Pompey invades Jerusalem.....	63 BC

Death of Julius Caesar..... 44 BC

## Chapter 12

The Messiah appears ..... from AD 27 to 30  
The Time of Trouble ..... from AD 67 to 70<sup>329</sup>

In essence, this book of Daniel “was a prophecy given so that the Jews of the Restoration period, from the time of the Persian kings onward, would know the times and events surrounding the coming of the Messiah.”<sup>330</sup> “The thrust of the whole prophecy of Daniel is to point to the time of the birth of the Messiah – “in the days of these kings” (Daniel 2:44).”<sup>331</sup> Daniel 9 sums up the book in this way:

<sup>24</sup> *“Seventy weeks are determined  
For your people and for your holy city,  
To finish the transgression,  
To make an end of sins,  
To make reconciliation for iniquity,  
To bring in everlasting righteousness,  
To seal up vision and prophecy,  
And to anoint the Most Holy.*

<sup>25</sup> *“Know therefore and understand,  
That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until Messiah the Prince,  
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.*

<sup>26</sup> *“And after the sixty-two weeks  
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;  
And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.*

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<sup>329</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 47-49.

<sup>330</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 18.

<sup>331</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 94.

*The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.*

*<sup>27</sup> Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.” Daniel 9:24–27 (NKJV)*

In summary, here we see the coming and work of Jesus:

*To finish the transgression,  
To make an end of sins,  
To make reconciliation for iniquity,  
To bring in everlasting righteousness, Daniel 9:24b (NKJV)*

And here we learn that “*Messiah shall be cut off...*”

*And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but  
not for Himself; (Daniel 9:26a, NKJV)*

This is followed by startling information:

*And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.  
Daniel 9:26b (NKJV)*

All this brings us to the Olivet Discourse; it is in the Olivet Discourse that we learn more about the coming destruction of the city and its sanctuary.

### ***The Olivet Discourse***

In studying Matthew, we see the Old Covenant or Old Testament coming to an end, and we see the sanctions of that covenant being discussed by Jesus. These are found in Matthew 8-25. Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, we see these sanctions spoken of in greater

## When Will These Things Be?

detail, especially in Matthew chapters 21-25; here, they increasingly bring the curses of the covenant to the forefront.

*“Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”” (Matthew 24:1–2, ESV)*

In Luke’s version of this sermon, Jesus says:

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

From our study of the Olivet Discourse, several startling conclusions must be drawn. Indeed, it is clear that all the following prophecies were fulfilled *before* that present generation passed and are not still in our future.

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

- |                                             |                |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) The Deception of False Christs:          | Matthew 24:4-5 |
| 2) Wars and Rumors of Wars:                 | Matthew 24:6   |
| 3) Famines, Pestilences, and Earthquakes:   | Matthew 24:7   |
| 4) The Beginning of Birth Pains:            | Matthew 24:8   |
| 5) Delivered Up to Tribulations and Death:  | Matthew 24:9   |
| 6) Betray and Hate One Another:             | Matthew 24:10  |
| 7) False Prophets Will Deceive Many:        | Matthew 24:11  |
| 8) Lawlessness and Love Growing Cold:       | Matthew 24:12  |
| 9) He Who Endures to the End:               | Matthew 24:13  |
| 10) This Gospel Is Preached to The Nations: | Matthew 24:14  |
| 11) The Abomination of Desolation:          | Matthew 24:15  |
| 12) Those in Judea, Flee to The Mountains:  | Matthew 24:16  |
| 13) Those on The Housetop:                  | Matthew 24:17  |
| 14) Those in The Field:                     | Matthew 24:18  |
| 15) Those Pregnant and Nursing Babies:      | Matthew 24:19  |
| 16) Flight in The Winter:                   | Matthew 24:20  |
| 17) A Great Tribulation:                    | Matthew 24:21  |
| 18) Days Shortened for The Elect’s Sake:    | Matthew 24:22  |
| 19) Look, Here Is the Christ:               | Matthew 24:23  |

20) False Christs and False Prophets:	Matthew 24:24
21) Warned Beforehand:	Matthew 24:25
22) In the Desert or Inner Rooms:	Matthew 24:26
23) The Quickness/Visibility of His Coming:	Matthew 24:27
24) The Carcass and The Eagles:	Matthew 24:28
25) The Sun, The Moon, The Stars:	Matthew 24:29
26) The Sign of The Son of Man:	Matthew 24:30
27) They Will Gather Together His Elect:	Matthew 24:31
28) The Parable of The Fig Tree:	Matthew 24:32
29) At the Very Gates:	Matthew 24:33

*“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” (Matthew 24:34, NKJV)*

It is only after Matthew 24:34 and 35 that Jesus speaks of the end of the world issues using the inclusio day and hour to set off these instructions.

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” (Matthew 24:36, NKJV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” (Matthew 25:13, NKJV)*

The last section, 25:14 to 25:46, speaks of Talents, Sheep & Goats at the last judgment:

*“And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:30, NKJV)*

*“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels....’ (Matthew 25:41, NKJV)*

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

It is at this point that the sanctions of the Old Covenant come to an end—the temporal sanctions of 24:4 – 24:35 and the eternal ones of 24:36 – 25:46.

### ***The Times and the Seasons***

As we end, we must ask, is there not anything in the Scripture that gives us the *times and the seasons*, that tells us of the soon coming of Christ at the end of time? Is there nothing that will give us insight into the nearness of his final coming at the end of the world? Why, yes, there is....

*“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3, NKJV)

Here Paul tells us that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 24:42-44 as well. And you will remember that this is the section in the Olivet Discourse that deals with the final coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

And what will these times and seasons look like? Well, they look like—*peace and safety*. It will be a typical day; nothing extraordinary is set before us. It will be like the days of Noah; ordinary activities will be taking center stage like picnics, parties, marriage festivals (Matthew 24:37-38). Routine work will be the norm; some will be working in the field; others will be grinding at the mill (Matthew 24:40-41). “*So also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*” No wars, no famines, no earthquakes, just everyday life. “According to Jesus, the “end of the age” will not be a time of war, famine, pestilence, false prophets, and tribulations. It will be a time of peace and prosperity. That will make the end all the more unexpected.”<sup>332</sup>

*“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* (Matthew 24:44, NKJV)

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<sup>332</sup> Jay Rogers, *In the Days of These Kings*, (Clermont, FL, Media House International, 2017), 251.

***The Book of Revelation***

Some thirty years after Jesus teaches this message on the Mount of Olives, the apostle John writes his Apocalypse. A careful study of this book will show that John is again discussing the same subject as Jesus, the destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem, and the nation of Israel.

Many theologians have convincingly argued that the Olivet discourse, sometimes called the *little apocalypse*, is the brief version of the Book of Revelation.<sup>333</sup> 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....”<sup>334</sup> 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).<sup>335</sup>

And indeed, the Book of Revelation covers the same material as that of the Olivet Discourse. Here is a comparison of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse doing just that.

**The Book of Revelation**

Revelation 2–3  
This material deals with false apostles, persecution, lawlessness, love grown cold, and the duty of perseverance

Revelation 4–7

**The Olivet Discourse**

Matthew 24:3–5, 9–13  
Chapter 24 also deals with false Christ’s and prophets, persecution, lawlessness, love grown cold, and the duty of perseverance

Matthew 24:6–8  
Again, Matthew deals with wars,

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<sup>333</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1887, 1999), 379.

<sup>334</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (New York, NY: Curts & Jennings, 1898), 276.

<sup>335</sup> C. Marvin Pate, Editor, “A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” in, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and C. Marvin Pate, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 53.

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The Seven Seals that deal with wars, famines, and earthquakes

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

Matthew 24:14–27

And again, Matthew tells of the Church's witness to the world, her flight, the Great Tribulation, and false prophets

Revelation 15–22

The Seven Chalicees describe 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

Matthew 24:28–31

Matthew describes the same events in 24:28–31.<sup>336</sup>

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

### **BOTH REVELATION AND THE OLIVET DISCOURSE TEACH A SOON FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY**

First, there is an urgency in time between Revelation and the Olivet Discourse. Each teaches 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 PASSAGES BLEND TWO KEY OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES**

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<sup>336</sup> David Chilton, The Days of Vengeance (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 20.

The blending of two key Old Testament passages is similar. Those two 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)*

*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)*

Now notice that Christ's statement in Matthew combines these two Old Testament passages. They are used similarly 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)*

And now notice the statement in Revelation which does 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)*

## **MATTHEW AND REVELATION HAVE THE THEME OF TRIBULATION**

The great tribulation is the central element in both the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.

## When Will These Things Be?

*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 BOOKS 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)*

So, what is the conclusion of the matter? 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."<sup>337</sup><sup>338</sup>

### **In these Books, there is One Common Theme**

Although told in many ways using a variety of symbols, in these books one critical theme is common. All address the last days of Israel and all end in explaining that the greatest crime in human history, the murder of the Messiah, will not go unpunished; God will destroy the Temple, the city, Jerusalem, and the nation, Israel.

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<sup>337</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Apocalypse," in Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), vol. II, 652f.

<sup>338</sup> Ralph E. Bass, Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 45–48.

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### ***But What About These Events?***

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In our age, several prophetic themes are addressed year after year by a plethora of “end-of-the-world” speakers and writers. Here are some of the high points: 1) Jesus is going to rapture the Church soon. 2) He will take his people to heaven for seven years. 3) During that period, Israel will rebuild their Temple. 4) At which time, there will be great tribulation—with wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines will be all over the world. 5) The antichrist will rise and attack Israel. 6) At the end of seven years, Jesus will come back and save the day. 7) At this point, the millennium will begin.

We have all had various Bible passages drummed into our minds in such a way as to appear to teach a Dispensational Premillennial view of the end times. But is that true? Let’s consider a few.

#### **The Rapture**

Although the word rapture is not found in the Bible, the concept is taught using other words. Two main proofs of the rapture, or of Jesus end-of-world coming, are the passages:

*“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—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.”*  
(1 Corinthians 15:51–52, NKJV)

*“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 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. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”*  
(1 Thessalonians 4:15–17, NKJV)

As indicated, this last coming of Christ is embraced by all orthodox Christians and is not a doctrine championed only by

Dispensationalists. Thus, for this point, we are not in conflict with them but in agreement. So, what is the point?

The Dispensationalists' explanation of the rapture has become the measure of orthodoxy in evangelical Christianity today. Failure to adhere to it will get you suspicious looks by those that have heard nothing but this one teaching all their lives.

If one believes in what is called a pre-tribulation pre-millennial rapture, then for Dispensationalists, you are orthodox. However, if you adhere to a post-tribulation rapture, or no tribulation before the rapture, then you are clearly in error, something less than orthodox, probably heretical, and one which many Dispensationalists would not care to "fellowship."

Now what makes this so strange is that the term "pre-tribulation pre-millennial rapture" is not in the Bible and did not appear on the scene of Christian theology until 1830, having been invented by a layman and deacon in the Church of England by the name of John Nelson Darby. Darby went on to found the Brethren Movement in England. C. I. Schofield, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—a high school graduate without formal theological training, who gave himself a doctor's degree—published a study Bible adhering strictly to Darby's notes and thereby popularized his theology. Before these dates, nearly all of Christendom adhered to what is called a post-millennial rapture, with little or no mention of a tribulation anywhere in the mix.

Nevertheless, most Christians today embrace this Dispensational theology. However, the placement of the rapture before the, or a, Great Tribulation should not be viewed as an undisputed point of orthodoxy. It is disputed and is not the common understanding of the coming of Christ in the history of the Church.

That leaves us with two additional issues to discuss, the tribulation and the millennium.

## **The Tribulation**

Everyone knows that there is a coming great tribulation in this world. Why do we know this? It is because Dispensationalism tells us that the Great Tribulation discussed in the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation occurs at this point in history. But are they right?

## When Will These Things Be?

### *The Olivet Discourse*

Let's look again at the Olivet Discourse for the passages that instruct us on the coming Great Tribulation.

*"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake."  
(Matthew 24:9, NKJV)*

*"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."  
(Matthew 24:21, NKJV)*

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

Before we go further, take note that every one of these passages come between these two verses:

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

*"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."  
(Matthew 24:34, NKJV)*

These two verses serve as inclusios<sup>339</sup> around the section in the Olivet Discourse in which Christ addresses the destruction of the Temple, which was the result of the disciple's question *"Tell us, when will these things be?"* (Matthew 24:3, NKJV).

The 3 ½ year period that included the Great Tribulation, and that culminated in the destruction of the Temple, took place between A.D. 67-70. So, from a strictly historical point of view, and one firmly

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<sup>339</sup> "In biblical studies, 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>

based on Scripture, the Great Tribulation occurred some 2000 years ago.

### *The Book of Revelation*

In the Book of Revelation, we see the word “tribulation” used five times. The first four times, they speak of the tribulation that the Church is then experiencing: Revelation 1:9; 2:9-10; 2:22. And in fact, this was a major part of the Great Tribulation, and it occurred in the first century A.D.

The word is used one other time in Revelation:

*“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:13–14, NKJV)*

The Book of Revelation, covering the same material as the Olivet Discourse but in fuller detail, is here speaking of this same 3 ½ year period of persecution and tribulation. The Jewish Church in Jerusalem was spared much of that persecution by fleeing to Pella; however, the Gentile Church in the rest of the world did experience it as Revelation 1:9; 2:9-10; 2:22 demonstrate.

Among other places at that time, thousands of Christians were killed by Nero in Rome when he nailed their bodies to crosses, covered them with pitch, and lit them as torches for his parties.

So, contrary to pop-eschatology, the Great Tribulation is now 2000 years behind us. As a result, a pre-tribulation rapture did not happen then, nor will it occur in our future. But note, this is not the same thing as saying the rapture will not ensue in our future for it certainly will. Nor are we saying that tribulation has not occurred all through the history of the Church; it has. And it will continue to do so until Jesus comes. All we are saying is that the “Great Tribulation” of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation has seen fulfillment in the first century in God’s judgment of Israel for murdering the Lord of Glory.

## The Millennium

What is the Millennium? It is a thousand-year period mentioned six times in the Book of Revelation: Revelation 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and alluded to in the Old Testament. This term is found nowhere else in scripture other than in Revelation 20.

There are three major positions on the millennium common in the Christian Church. One, Jesus will come before the millennium or the Pre-Millennial view; two, the Millennium is unfolding now during the Church Age or the Amillennial view; and three, Jesus will come after the Millennium or the Post-Millennial view.

The popular end-time teaching of the Dispensationalists is that Jesus will come before the Millennium—with the Great Tribulation before that.

So, where does the Olivet Discourse fit within these options?

First, let's note that the Olivet Discourse is divided into two sections. The first is Matthew 23:36-24:35. The material found in this section is what Dispensationalist typically use to prove the coming Great Tribulation using this verse:

*"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."* (Matthew 24:21, NKJV),

The problem with this position is that this section is bound by these two passages.

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

*"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."* (Matthew 24:34, NKJV)

In other words, all the material between these two points happened in the first century just before Jesus' judgment coming on Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple in A.D. 70.

The second section in the Olivet Discourse follows in Matthew 24:36 and goes through Matthew 25:46. This material addresses Jesus' second coming at the end of time. This section begins with Jesus telling the disciples that no one will know the day and the hour of his coming (contrary to popular prophecy experts who suggest that they do so).

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36, NKJV)*

The section ends with eternal punishment, and eternal life meted out on the last day.

*"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46, NKJV)*

So, to the question asked earlier, "Where does the Olivet Discourse fit within these Millennial options?" we must conclude that in that Discourse, nothing is said about a millennium at all. That does not mean there is no millennium, just that Jesus did not address it in the Olivet Discourse. But we can confidently say this, the Great Tribulation, has seen its fulfillment in the first century.

*"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:21, NKJV),*

Although there is a Millennium in our future, there will not be another, unmentioned Great Tribulation, yet to occur before a coming Millennium.

But to expand this discussion on the Millennium just a bit, we should note that there are major problems with the Millennium coming after Jesus' second coming, instead of before Jesus' second coming. Paul explains this problem in I Corinthians.

*"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. .... But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. **Then comes the end**, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an*

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*end to all rule and all authority and power.” (1 Corinthians 15:20–24, NKJV)*

Notice that **the end** is not a thousand years after his coming; it is at his coming. His coming and the end of the world occur at the same time. In other words, His coming is post-millennial, not pre-millennial.

## The Antichrist

The word antichrist is mentioned five times in the New Testament, all in John’s epistles.

*“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18, NKJV)*

*“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.” (1 John 2:22, NKJV)*

*“and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” (1 John 4:3, NKJV)*

*“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” (2 John 7, NKJV)*

The word is found nowhere else in the New Testament. However, two other terms are often thought to address the same person, “*man of sin*,” and “*the lawless one*.”

*“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NKJV)*

*“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” (2 Thessalonians 2:8, NKJV)*

The Dispensationalists tell us that the Antichrist (man of sin or lawless one) will appear on the scene during the Great Tribulation. Well, he did, he was Emperor Nero. After all, John does say, “*by which we know that it is the last hour.*” (1 John 2:18, NKJV) and of this person he says, “*and is now already in the world.*” (1 John 4:3, NKJV). Clearly, John understood that this antichrist was coming in his *near* future. And this is the point we have been making all throughout this study, the Great Tribulation, along with the antichrist, did indeed come at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in the first century. But beyond that, there is nothing in the Bible that would project this mysterious person into our future at the end of time.

### **The Beast or the Mark of the Beast**

Sometimes “the antichrist,” “man of sin,” and “the lawless one” are associated with “the beast” found in the Book of Revelation. That is probably a correct association. The term *beast* is found 37 times in Revelation addressing a demonic figure during the period referred to in the Book of Revelation. An excellent place to start in a study of the *beast* would be in the “Beast of Revelation” by Ken Gentry and “Last Days Madness” by Gary DeMar.

This “beast” found only in Revelation is a prominent figure in this book’s discussion of that time—the first century. However, if that time was identical to the time of the Olivet Discourse, then the *beast* was active during the persecutions of both Israel and the Church during the first century. Therefore, he will not be a factor in the last coming of Jesus at the end of time.

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***To Sum it Up: What is the Message of the Olivet Discourse?***

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Clearly, the message of the Olivet Discourse is one of judgment. And this message is directed to those that were historically his “people,” the nation of Israel. But a past relationship with God does not always protect one from judgment; indeed, it often enhances the likelihood of judgment on those who know better, having greater revelation, but still fail to cherish the holiness of God. And that certainly includes the Church as well.

*“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”* (Revelation 2:5, NKJV)

I think we should also note that although this sermon by Jesus mentions the judgments to come in eternity, the primary point here is that judgment for sin occurs in time as well as eternity. Many of those that complain the loudest about their lot in life are those that have defied God the most. They are experiencing judgment in time but fail to realize that this judgment is one earned because of their sin.

We might also note that many of the righteous fled this judgment, having been warned by Jesus, *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* (Matthew 24:16, NKJV). It is not uncommon for believers to escape the lot of those around them because of God’s loving care.

It is true that not all sin is judged in time or all the righteous escape persecution in time. But it is also true that all receive their just reward in eternity. These are the messages of the Olivet Discourse.

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### ***Works by the Author***

- What About Baptism? A Discussion on the Mode, Candidate, and Purpose of Christian Baptism
- Hope for Today's Problems – The How to Book of Christian Living
- Back to The Future – A Preterist Study in The Book of Revelation
- Tell Me About Presbyterians – Just What Do They Believe?
- Baptidzo – A 500 Year Study in the Greek Word Baptism
- Sermon on the Mount – The Stipulations of the New Covenant
- When Will These Things Be? A Preterist Study in the Olivet Discourse
- The Time of the End – A Preterist Commentary on the Book of Daniel

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