



# THE ESCHATOLOGY OF JESUS



A Look at the Coming of Jesus in Matthew 24

All Scripture Quotations from the New American Standard Bible 1995 ed.  
Lockman Foundation

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
PART 1: PRECURSORS.....	6
<b>THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>THE MESSIAH &amp; THE TEMPLE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE FIG TREE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHIEF PRIESTS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE LANDOWNER.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>THE CHALLENGE OF THE PHARISEES.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>THE CHALLENGE OF THE SADDUCEES.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>THE SECOND CHALLENGE OF THE PHARISEES.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>WHO'S SON IS THE MESSIAH?.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS EXPOSED.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>THE SEVEN WOES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>UPON THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WOULD THE GUILT FALL.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>THE LAMENTATION FOR JERUSALEM &amp; THE DESOLATE HOUSE.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Part 2: The Olivet Discourse.....	24
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>TEARING DOWN THE TEMPLE STONES.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>THE QUESTIONS FROM THE DISCIPLES.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>THE WARNINGS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>THE DISCIPLES' SUFFERING &amp; BETRAYAL.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>MISLEADING FALSE PROPHETS AND THE COLD LOVE.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ENDURE TO THE END.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>THE GOSPEL SHALL BE PREACHED TO THE WHOLE WORLD.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>FLEE FROM THE TRIBULATION.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>THE GREAT TRIBULATION – WHAT HAPPENED IN JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>FALSE MESSIAH'S &amp; FALSE PROPHETS.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>THE SUN, MOON &amp; STARS.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN.....</b>	<b>48</b>

<b>THE NEARNESS OF HIS COMING: THE FIG TREE.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>INTERLUDE.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>NO ONE KNOWS.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>BE ON ALERT FOR HIS COMING.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING &amp; THE PARABLE OF THE 10 VIRGINS.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING &amp; THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING TO BRING SALVATION &amp; JUDGMENT.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: KEY TEXTS.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>THE FUTURE COMING AFTER ISRAEL IS EVANGELIZED.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>THE COMING IN GLORY: A PRECURSOR.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WILL SEE HIM COMING.....</b>	<b>62</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Debates over the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures have raged as long as the bible has been around. Church history is full of these disputes and while some were but simple textual or doctrinal disagreements, others took on the form of an all-out campaign against heretical teachings especially surrounding those teachings related to the person of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. Even in the present day, we continue to dig into the scriptures to comprehend its message and fight the good fight to *contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints* (Jude 3). One important and positive effect of these debates has been their usefulness to produce some light in our conception of the words of God. Doctrines that are the most cherished to us and to which we are deeply rooted are those that we've examined the closest. Often, when a theological belief is questioned or challenged, we are thrown into a deep theological examination to understand the defend this belief. There are even times when we may become persuaded of a different doctrinal position. This has happened to the best of us, and we should be grateful for those who are willing to confront us. It is good for us to question and debate, keeping in the spirit of *Iron sharpen iron* (Proverbs 27:17) and that *the first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.* (Proverbs 18:17).

Much like any doctrine or even many biblical passages, there are always potential uncertainties in ascertaining their meaning. We are not living in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and most of us don't speak Aramaic hence there are things that we just struggle to comprehend. To be clear, this is not an uncertainty of authority, inspiration, or reliability, but of clarity. The study of eschatology<sup>2</sup> could be classified as one of these areas that truly presents us with this problem and in return that requires further debate and study. The vast array of interpretations on just how things are going to end is complex. Studying the whole of the many scriptures associated with the events surrounding the return of Christ is both time consuming and intricate. Roughly 25-30% of the bible is eschatological in nature and to come up with a systematized eschatological outline can certainly be a lifetime studious adventure. It becomes even more daunting an endeavour when we consider that many of the eschatological texts are largely symbolic in nature. While I'm not persuaded that we can grasp biblical eschatology beyond a shadow of a doubt, I still believe the study of the end in relation to Christ's coming and human history is significant and worth the investment. We simply may need to be satisfied with basing our conclusion upon the balance of probabilities rather than beyond a shadow of a doubt. Still, if we truly desire to know more about the Messiah and His glorious Kingdom, this study is necessary whether we can fully see the outcome.

While debate and passionate discussions produce deeper study and reflection, there can also be serious effects. We must make every attempt to keep the air cool and avoid divisions between brethren because of an interpretation of eschatology. Unlike primary doctrines that are non-negotiables and clear in scripture, discussions and debates on the end times can be had without the severing of fellowship. We can be passionate about our understanding without severing ties with our brothers & sisters. We must stay focused upon those things that unite us rather than divide us.

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<sup>1</sup> Some noted heresies would be Sabellianism, Arianism and Pelagianism, just to name a few.

<sup>2</sup> Eschatology simply means the study of the last things or the end.

I've spent a few years reading on the theme of eschatology and examining texts of scripture associated with this study. That, added with many conversations on the end times, have allowed me to have at least an understanding of the many interpretations of eschatology. What I came to realize, however, is that I've never truly been persuaded and satisfied with a particular position. Some I have found more persuasive than others but at this time in my life, I want to once and for all settle it for myself. I want to take the time to evaluate those texts that truly speak on the subject and come to a conclusion for me personally. A position that I can conscientiously affirm!

While there are hundreds of biblical texts that are eschatological in nature, I want to begin with what Jesus taught about eschatology. What did the Christ say about the end times? We can't even begin to understand biblical eschatology before doing a true examination of Jesus' teaching on the subject. The most extensive of all that Jesus had to say about eschatology is found in the Olivet Discourse. The passages of Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 & Luke 21 are central to this study and form the foundation to all other biblical examinations. The Olivet Discourse spells out Jesus' own record of the outcomes of human history in relation to His coming. What did Jesus communicate to His disciples about what was in store for them and at the end of time? How should they behave based upon this revelation? The Olivet Discourse addresses these very points. With its interpretation in mind, we then are able to address other eschatological passages to create a framework on what to expect from the future!

The Olivet Discourse is not without its interpretive challenges and in return, has created some different points of view. Certain passages seem to relate to signs & events in the lives of the disciples living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century while other incidents are predicted to happen towards the end of human history. This is the tension between what is called the Preterist view, which sees the fulfillment of these passages in the events leading to and surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the Futurist view, which interprets these passages entirely at the end of human history. While there are some that are rigid when choosing between these two options, most scholars see a little of both.

The interpretation in this essay is based upon the partial-preterist view, which attempts to mingle the two views together by taking certain sections as pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem while other finding their fulfillment at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. Prior to delving into Matthew 24, I will begin by addressing the context in which the Olivet Discourse was given. I will examine several other eschatological passages found in the gospel of Matthew, then move to a much more in-depth review of Matthew 21-23 and the events that lead to the Discourse. I will then spend most of my time going over Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21 with the Matthean passages as my root.

## PART 1: PRECURSORS

Prior to examining the Olivet Discourse, it is important to consider the events just prior to the discussion with the disciples after they had just left Jerusalem. The confrontation with the leadership of Israel and the people of Jerusalem are the driving force behind the condemnation of the temple, the city and its representatives and inhabitants. The significance of His entry in Jerusalem and the encounters there should not be taken lightly. It builds an important context for all that will follow especially in chapter 24 of this beautiful gospel. These are the foundation behind the words of judgment expressed by the Lord at the eastern mountain. In the next few chapters, we will examine the impact on His entry into Jerusalem, His love for the people of the great city and the things of His Father, as well as, answering the challenge of the religious leaders finishing with a final condemnation of these leaders and of the temple, the city, and the people in that day. We will begin by examining Christ's entry into Jerusalem and His interaction with the people of David's city especially the leaders of Israel to build the context of the primary chapters we wish to examine, 24-25.

### THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH (Matthew 21:1-11 Mark 11:7-10/Luke 19:35-38)

Matthew begins this important section in his gospel by touching upon Christ's arrival near Jerusalem with a large crowd accompanying Him. The Lord Jesus sends the disciples to acquire a donkey and a colt prior to His entrance into the holy city. This was to fulfill a prophecy pronounced in Zechariah 9:9 & Isaiah 62:11 and we must pay attention to it since its fulfillment is truly significant. The quotation begins with "*say to the daughter of Zion*" which implies a message to the city of Jerusalem much like it did in the days of Zechariah. There is a call for the City of David to rejoice in the coming king who is "*just and humble*" and would "*bring salvation*". In both Isaiah and Zechariah, the theme is the coming salvation brought by the Messiah to Jerusalem. This coming king would bring His peace to the nations and dominion which would extend "*from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth*"<sup>3</sup>. The message of this prophecy was to declare that the Messiah had finally come to Jerusalem with His kingdom. The time of fulfillment of the promised Kingdom of God had come to that generation.

The reaction from the crowd following Him was to lay their cloaks in front of Him. This is similar language to the coronation of King Jehu where we read that *each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew he trumpet, saying "Jehu is King!"* (2 Kings 9:13). The spreading of their coats and branches were a symbol of their declaration of His Kingship. The crowd began to shout joyously proclaiming Jesus as "*Son of David*" and "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*". The latter expression is a quotation is from Psalm 118:27, a psalm that *describes a joyful pilgrimage into the*

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<sup>3</sup> R.T. France notes "a subtle tension within Zechariah's description of this messianic king: he is victorious and yet meek, and his triumph is received rather than won... He rides a donkey rather than a warhorse, and his kingdom will be one of peace rather than of coercion" (New International Commentary on the New Testament, R.T. France, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, Page 777)

*temple, led by the king (the one who comes in the name of the Lord)*<sup>4</sup>. The crowd shouts "hosanna", a praise to "save us immediately". The parallel in Mark's gospel adds the expression "blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David" (Mark 11:10), denoting that it wasn't simply the King, the Son of David that had come but also His Kingdom. The long-awaited procession of the Son of David and His kingdom into the streets of Jerusalem was happening then and there.

His entry into Jerusalem created excitement among the people in the streets. The text tells us that "*all the city was stirred*" and the shouting of proclamation of the coming of the Messiah added concern to the religious leaders. A city under the rule of a Roman prefect would not fare well if a king would come to declare His rule over them. When asked who was this One riding on a donkey into Jerusalem, the crowd refers to Him as "*The prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee*". The "prophet" was one who would represent God to bring them a divine message and, in return, came with authority granted by Yahweh. He came as a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) who would be able to claim God's authority above the religious leaders of Jerusalem.

An important feature is the manner that Luke records the sequence of events is in 19:41-44.

" When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

The passage speaks of Christ weeping over the city for the impending destruction that would fall upon it. In the passage in 24:1, the temple will be the focus of being torn down, but in this context, He is speaking of the city being every stone being destroyed, along with its inhabitants. Notice that the statement "*for the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side*. Later, Luke will use similar language of the abomination of desolation in terms of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies. It's important to recognize that the judgment to fall upon the city was local and coming to those who lived in Jerusalem in Christ's time during his 1<sup>st</sup> coming. Being reminded of this will help when we analyse the text of Matthew 24 in its context.

## **THE MESSIAH & THE TEMPLE (Matthew 21:12-17)**

The First stop after entering the great city was the temple area. It is impossible to minimize the centrality of the temple in both Jewish worship and life. It was a symbol of their national identity especially after the Maccabean revolt approximately 200 years earlier. This was the temple built by

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<sup>4</sup> New International Commentary on the New Testament, R.T. France, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, Page 780

Herod and it far surpassed Solomon's temple in grandeur and beauty. People came far and wide to worship and to admire its magnificent structures.

The area in which the passage is referring to, seems related to the Gentile court where pilgrims coming from a far distance could purchase animals for sacrifice rather than travel with their sacrifice. This was distinguished from the more restricted areas where only Jews were permitted to enter (including the temple itself). The animals were sold for money and the traders were likely making a hefty profit from the sale. The Lord's indignation came from their use of God's house as a place of trade rather than a place of prayer. The issue wasn't that He didn't want them to make money, but the problem was *where* they were trying to make the money. The Messiah's coming would bring hope that one day "*there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the Lord of hosts*" (Zechariah 14:21). The Messiah came to purify the temple of its polluted practices (Malachi 3:1-4). The Lord drove out these salesmen and ruined their illegal businesses by flipping their tables. There are also probably overtones of blame towards the religious leaders for allowing these activities to occur in the temple courtyard in the first place. The Messiah came to condemn what the religious leaders allowed. As we'll see, this brought a battle of authority. The Lord uses scripture as His means of establishing His actions. The Lord quotes from the text in Isaiah 56:7 which was a call for non-Jews to "*join themselves to the Lord*" and worship Him. He looked to a day where He would accept their worship in His temple, and they would call the center of this worship a "house of prayer". The merchants and religious leaders had things backwards in that they were turning instead the holy house of Yahweh into a den of thieves, a place of crime and thievery.

Jesus, then unexpectedly, heals a blind and lame man. What significance does this have to His entrance into the temple and coming as Messiah? When King David captured Jerusalem, the Jebusites said to him that he would not go there because the blind and lame would turn him away. David then declares "*whoever strikes the Jebusites, let him reach the lame and the blind, who are hated by David's soul... The blind and lame shall not come into the house*" (2 Samuel 5:6-8) One with a greater authority than David had come to Jerusalem who didn't condemn the blind and the lame but healed them. The response to this miracle came in the form of the Children's song "*hosanna to the Son of David*" which in return created, in the Chief priests and scribes a deep "resentfulness"- Christ's was accomplishing the works of God in the form of demonstrating mercy and compassion upon the lame and blind rather than ceremonial rituals<sup>5</sup>. The former was truly what was pleasing to God!

The Jewish leaders point out the saying of the children to the Lord Jesus in an obvious attempt to paint their praise as misguided. Christ's response comes in the form of a quotation from Psalm 8:4. The context of this passage in the Psalm is on "*how God the creator silences his enemies by means of strength*" which comes out of the mouth of children<sup>6</sup>. The praise of the children was the praise to God for the silencing of the religious leaders in His actions. Notice that while the psalm is attributed to praise Yahweh, while the children were paying tribute to Jesus.

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<sup>5</sup> We will examine the impact of this further in Matthew 22:41-45

<sup>6</sup> New International Commentary on the New Testament, R.T. France, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, P.789

## THE FIG TREE (Matthew 21:18-22)

On their way to the city the following morning, the Lord and the disciples passed by a fig tree which according to Mark was "in leaf" meaning, of course, that it was full of leaves. The fruit was not edible at this time (March -April) since it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13). The tree showed a promising abundance of leaves which would have led people to believe that a large quantity of fruit would blossom, however, the words of the Lord "*no longer shall there be any fruit from you*" shows that this tree drying up meant that it would no longer serve its purpose. *Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false. Jesus, unable to satisfy his hunger, not because it was not bearing fruit, whether in season or out, but because it made a show of life that promised fruit yet was bearing none*<sup>7</sup>. Fruit in scripture is largely a symbol of works that God requires of His people generally as a manifestation of the essence of a person and whether they are trusting in God or themselves (Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33). The fig tree was used in the OT in symbolic fashion in a similar way:

- Associated with judgment (Isaiah 34:4; Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10, 16-17; Joel 1:7)
- Those receiving God's promise of blessing as ripe fruit while those who receive a curse are rotten figs (Jeremiah 24:1-10)<sup>8</sup>

The disciples were absolutely amazed at the withering of this beautiful blossoming fig tree and questioned how it was possible for this tree to suddenly have withered away. The Lord then teaches them that if they have faith and don't doubt, they can do more than wither a fig tree, they can even move this mountain! It's important to notice that the mountain wasn't just any mountain, but He refers to it as "this mountain", probably identifying it as the temple mount being cast into the sea or destroyed. Faith and prayer would render the temple, as taken away from the glorification of God.

All things that they ask the Father in prayer, will be granted to them, if they believe. The miracle of the withering of the fig tree is more than simply a call to the disciples to practice powerful prayer. It probably served as a symbol of what was to come for Jerusalem. Unlike the worthless fig tree, that externally was beautiful but unable to produce edible fruits, they were to produce fruits in believing and not doubting. It might seem strange to the average person how this was an answer at all. The main point is not as much "prayer" as it is "faith" and not doubting. The fruits of faith are having assurance in God and that He will answer our needs. The said faith is powerful, and it can even proverbially move mountains!

The story is written in Mark's gospel in two parts with the cleansing of the temple in between (Mark 11:12-14, 20-24). This demonstrates the association of the withering of the fig tree with the temple and in return, its rituals. Both are beautiful and seem to demonstrate their purpose while both are obsolete

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<sup>7</sup> The Expositor's Bible Commentary with New International Version, D.A. Carson, Zondervan, 1995, p. 445

<sup>8</sup> While not explicit, the Lord might be expressing the fulfillment of Micah 7:1-6.

and there is coming a day when the temple will be judged much like the fig tree<sup>9</sup>. Something greater than the temple had come and it would be rejected by the faithless religious leaders.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHIEF PRIESTS (Matthew 21:23-27/ Mark 11:27-33/ Luke 20:1-8)**

The Chief Priests and elders of the people<sup>10</sup> approached the Lord when He entered the temple and while He was teaching, they began to question Him on the "things" He was doing. They probably hoped that when He had left the previous day that He would not return but He continued to teach in the temple and to a crowd of listeners. He was speaking publicly, and they wanted to confront Him openly mainly to dissuade His listeners. The *things* that provoked their inquiry was almost certainly His actions in the cleansing of the temple and His refusal to quiet the children's singing judgment. They asked by what authority was He doing these things and who gave Him that power/right to do it. These religious leaders were the authority over the people and the care of the temple was theirs by means of their office. Who was this Galilean who would question them? His answer was not what we would have expected given the situation since He didn't explicitly answer the question. In His day, a counter question as an answer was quite common in debate and in return His answer/question was both wise and clever.

The Lord challenges them by offering to answer their question if they are able to answer His. He uses their reaction to John the Baptist's teaching as a basis to this challenge. Before giving the source of His authority, he asks if they know the source of the authority of John the Baptist's baptism. Did John's baptism come from men or from heaven (God)? John the Baptist was considered a prophet (Matthew 3:1-4; 11:7-19) who pointed out that one greater than him would come (3:11-12) and even this superior One of whom John spoke accepted John's baptism (3:13-16). The dilemma brought a no-win situation for these accusers since if they said it was from heaven, then they were guilty of not believing it yet if they answered that it was from men, they risked being stoned by the crowd. *"To voice their true view of John would have exposed them to popular anger, but to give an insincere answer would expose them to ridicule, since their rejection of John's message was well known, as Jesus will confirm in v.32"*<sup>11</sup> If they couldn't discern by who's authority John received his baptism, how could they decipher by who the Messiah received His authority? Rather than risk the bad publicity in either answer, they decided not to answer the question.

The leaders didn't recognize their Messiah and even questioned His authority even if they outwardly accepted John the Baptist's. Their attempt to rebuke our Lord Jesus was meant to interrupt the gathering of the children in the way that a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. This unbelief would

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<sup>9</sup> There is a tendency to disassociate the fig tree from the temple and Israel with the argument that the fig tree is never related to Israel. Looking at the association of this text with the cleansing of the temple and the judgment language in Matthew on faithless Israel, it would make better sense to interpret this with the coming judgment of the faithless covenant-breaking people (See Carson P.445)

<sup>10</sup> The gospels of Mark & Luke add that the Scribes were present during this encounter also. It should be noted that the two groups were representatives of the religion, the temple and the people.

<sup>11</sup> France P. 799

prove to be the condemnation upon them and upon the city. Their actions in the crucifixion would exhibit just how deep their unbelief would run.

## **EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS (Matthew 21:28-32)**

The Lord Jesus begins His lengthy rebuke of the religious leaders for their rejection of the call of God and their standing in His sight in three concise parables. The first parable begins with a father who had two sons and to whom he tasked the care of his vineyard. One of the sons agreed to his father's wishes but didn't deliver on his word while the other initially rejected the request but had a change of heart which led to faithfully doing what his father had asked. The Lord then asks the religious leaders which son had done the will of his father to which they rightfully answered the first. The vineyard here probably alludes to Isaiah 5:1-7 where the vineyard is identified with Israel<sup>12</sup>. They maintained that they held to the law of God and even viewed themselves as the protectors of its content. Those who they despised the most in society (tax collectors and prostitutes - Luke 18:11) were the ones who had a change of heart and came to Him in repentance. The amazing point of the parable in this text is that these "sinners" who were represented by the first son would go into the kingdom first ahead of these religious leaders who would be found outside (Matthew 8:11-12). The Lord then goes on, in v.32, to explain that these leaders would find themselves condemned for not responding to John the Baptist's message. John showed them the way of righteousness through his life and in his message. The message of repentance was not received by these religious leaders, but the tax collectors and prostitutes had accepted it through repentance and baptism. Not only had the leaders not repented when hearing John's message but they even refused to repent after the sinners that they loathed so greatly had received it!

The moral of the story is that the religious leaders, much like the 2nd son, spoke of answering the call of God but it was the 1st son, who represented the tax collectors and prostitutes, who recognized their sins, repented and went to work for their Lord who would find God's favour. The recipients of the Kingdom were those who repented and produced the fruit of repentance preached by John the Baptist.

## **EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE LANDOWNER (Matthew 21:33-41/ Mark 12:1-12/ Luke 20:9-18)**

This second parable begins with a landowner who planted a vineyard and rented it to a group of vine-growers. The owner was most likely someone wealthy since the possession of a new vineyard and slaves is attributed to someone prosperous. He would require farmers to grow the crops and generally an agreement needed to be reached upon how much the landowner would receive as his portion of the crop once fruit began to be produced (generally after 4 years). The vine-growers would receive the rest of the crops as their wage. In the parable, the landowner sent trusted slaves to gather his due crop and

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<sup>12</sup> France points out that there are some differences: "The allegories are not the same in that in Isaiah it is the fruit itself that fails, while here it is the tenants; in Isaiah the vineyard is itself destroyed, but here it is given to new tenants, so that in this parable there remains hope for the future, whereas in Isaiah all is disaster" (P. 812)

these vine-growers decided to stiff the owner by refusing to give him his fair share. Not only did they refuse to pay him his part but savagely beat and murdered the slaves. Finally, the landowner decides to send his son as an ambassador to reason with them and expected a certain amount of respect from these vine-growers. A son in this culture in the first century was considered the heir and the highest representative of the landowner. But the respect that the landowner's son merited was not received. They treated his son in a similar fashion as they did to the previous slaves and murdered his inheritor.

The allegory in this parable represents a historical review of Israel's continuous rejection of God's prophets. Jeremiah even stated in his day that they had not obeyed the prophets sent by Yahweh (Jeremiah 7:25-27)<sup>13</sup>. The Lord quotes Isaiah 5:1-7 to establish that the vineyard is in fact Israel. The death of the Son will be fulfilled by the leaders of Israel in antagonizing the crucifixion of the sinless Son of God causing His murder outside the city. They would rebel against the will of God in a climactic way, by not only rejecting His claims but also would finally have Him put to death. The parable concludes when the landowner himself comes to the vineyard and Jesus asks the religious leaders what he should do at his coming. They rightly answer that these wicked men deserve a wretched end not realizing that they are the ones who placed the verdict upon their own heads. Later in the gospel, the Lord Jesus will address this again adding a final condemnation upon them in that *"upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the righteous blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar"* (Matthew 23:25). What is especially fascinating about the parable is that, not only were they to receive judgment for their actions against the slaves and the son, but that vineyard would be rented to another, and these would pay him what he is due. This would be those who would inherit the Kingdom!<sup>14</sup>

Jesus responds to their answer of punishing the vine growers by quoting Psalm 118:22-23 (Matthew 21:42) to demonstrate that the Son of God whom they rejected would become the chief corner stone. This stone would have an effect upon those who would fall upon it. To those who would be faithful to God, the stone would become a sanctuary but to those who were unfaithful, it would cause them to stumble and be broken (Isaiah 8:14-15). It's important to note that this Psalm was also used by the early church in regards to Israel's rejection of their Messiah and others coming in salvation who have faith in Him (Jews & Gentiles). They are those who would become a house that would offer spiritual sacrifices to God (Acts 4:11; Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:4-8). This same stone would break all other kingdoms and would eventually grow to become a mountain that fills the whole earth (Daniel 2:44-45)!

The Lord continues with a more explicit explanation of the renting out of the vineyard to another vine-grower. The kingdom is referring to the Kingdom of God which would be "taken away" from them and in return given to a nation that would produce the fruit of it. Jesus seems to intertwine the term "vineyard" with the "kingdom" probably alluding to the true Kingdom of Israel. The vineyard is not replaced with another vineyard, but the care of the vineyard is given to another nation. The term

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<sup>13</sup> Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23), Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-22), The prophets murdered by Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:10-19; 38:4-13) and Zechariah (Matthew 23:35/Zechariah 1:1)

<sup>14</sup> It's important to note that there are not two vineyards mentioned but one that is transferred to another.

"nation" is singular meaning that it won't be multiple peoples of God but one united people who will bear fruit from it.

This parable continues the same thematic approach as the previous one. God expects his servants to receive His word and to live a life bearing the fruit of His will. The kingdom will be taken from the religious leaders and given to another nation consisting of those who have believed God's word and produced actions that would be fitting to the glory of the heavenly landowner.

### **EXPOSING THE LEADERS: THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST (Matthew 22:1-14/ Luke 14:16-24)**

In the third parable, the Lord relates the kingdom to the story of a king who was preparing a wedding feast for his son. He sends his servants to gather people for the banquet and calls those who had been invited to come when the preparations were completed. The original invitees finally reject the summons to the son's wedding. Many excuses were made for their refusal. Some went their way to deal with everyday business responsibilities while others went further by rejecting the King's request by mistreating the servants even to the extent of killing them. This act of murder led to the kindling of the king's righteous anger and he sends his armies to destroy them and their city. In a surprising twist, the king sends his servants to call people to the feast who were not originally invited, even seeking them from the highways and streets whether good or evil. During the wedding feast, the king makes his rounds to acknowledge the guests and finds some not dressed appropriately for the wedding which led to their expulsion from the banquet.

The king, in this parable, represents God the Father and the son can easily be identified as Jesus<sup>15</sup>. The marriage feast is speaking of the Messiah's Kingdom. The servants sent to the original invitees signify the OT prophets and the 2nd set of servants was probably referring to the repeated appeals to come including John the Baptist and the apostles. The religious leaders confirmed their refusal to come to the Messianic kingdom by taking no action to accompany their said acceptance (no fruit). Their rejection even went as far as to kill the prophets. They rejected the invitation based upon everyday responsibilities such as farming and business, not appreciating the honour that came with the invitation. In v.7, the Lord states that they and their city would be destroyed by armies. This was accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when the Roman armies led by Titus destroyed the temple and burned the city to the ground. Some may object that this was not the army of God but Caesars, yet the OT is full of examples of God using a pagan nation to judge Israel (Isaiah 10:5-11; 44:28-45:7; Jeremiah 25:9)<sup>16</sup>. The city and its temple were filled with polluted practices which led to the original encounter with the religious leaders.

The invitees from the streets are symbolized by those who had no special status in society or religious life in Jerusalem such as the tax collectors and prostitutes from 21:31. Interestingly, in what is particular

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<sup>15</sup> The Lord Jesus is represented as a bridegroom in many instances (John 3:29; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 21:2,9)

<sup>16</sup> This theme will be further developed in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21

to this parable, the Lord states that within these outsiders, there are those who are good and those who are evil. This theme is reoccurring throughout the gospel whether in the form of those who cast out demons in His name but were practicing lawless deeds (Matthew 7:21-23) or the wheat and the tares grow together until the end of the age where the tares are burned with fire (Matthew 13:38-41) for their lawlessness. Much like the landowner in the previous parable, the king *comes* to the banquet guests. He looks over the invitees discovering some who were not dressed appropriately for the wedding feast. The symbolism is challenging to interpret. Did the invitee refuse to put on a garment provided by the king? Did he have clothing at home that he refused to wear? Regardless, the result of the refusal to wear the proper wedding attire is a fate worse than the original invitees in that they are cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, the abode of the damned.

The Lord Jesus summarizes the entire parable in saying that many are called but few are chosen. The term "for" gives the reason for their casting into the darkness. There were two groups invited to the feast, the first rejected the call to the wedding feast through their actions (fruits) and within the second group, some rejected the call through different actions (fruits). Yet, the Lord is clear that those invited who were accepted the invitation and dressed appropriately for the feast didn't receive the king's approval due to the calling, but because of being of the chosen. It is the children of the promise that receive the kingdom, the elect, God's true chosen people. Within all those who were called (the many), only a few were chosen to remain at the banquet of the son.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF THE PHARISEES (Matthew 22:15-22/ Mark 12:13-17/ Luke 20: 20-26)**

After His rebuke against them in the form of parables, the Pharisees gathered with the purpose to devise an ill-intentioned plan to trap Him. They needed to discredit Him especially in front of the crowds that were listening to the great teacher. Once the plan was conjured, instead of going to the Lord themselves to execute the plot, they sent some of their disciples<sup>17</sup> accompanied by Herodians whom Luke calls "spies". The Herodians didn't generally have any dealings in Judea since it was no longer under Herod. The purpose of their visitation was most likely to bring political representatives into the debate. They begin with their custom insincere flattery in focusing upon His honesty and His ability to give an answer without being a respecter of persons. The questions stemmed from the necessity to pay a pole tax. *The poll tax had been among the taxes imposed on Judea following the imposition of direct Roman rule in A.D. 6, not long before, and had been fiercely resented by patriotic Jews, resulting in serious revolt led by Judas*<sup>18</sup>. It was a symbol of their slavery to Rome and was an incredibly hot topic in Palestine since its inception. These Pharisaical disciples were attempting to drag Jesus into a heated political issue. His answer would stir the proverbial pot in one of two directions. An affirmative response meant that He sided with paying the tax which would have stirred the nationalistic Jewish crowds against Him. On the

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<sup>17</sup> In Mark's rendition, the Pharisees went with the Herodians to trap Him. The disciples in this event were probably Pharisees themselves who were sent by other Pharisees.

<sup>18</sup> France P. 829

other hand, a negative response would have placed Him in rebellion against the Romans so that *they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor* (Luke 20:20).

The Lord recognized their insincerity and asked why they are attempting to trap Him. He then asks them for a silver denarius and wittingly poses a question of His own. He inquires of them who's image was on the coin. The coin bore the image Caesar and was a representation of his authority. The Lord doesn't allow Himself to be pulled in either direction<sup>19</sup>. He tells them to give back to Caesar what he is owed but to give to God what He is owed. It should be noted that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees was publicly manifested in this encounter. As R.T. France points out:

Pious Jews objected to the "idolatrous" coin, which carried not only a human portrait (in contravention of the second commandment, Exod 20:4) but also an inscription which described the Roman emperor as *Divi Filius*, son of a god (in contravention of the first commandment, Exod 20:3). Roman imperial policy, aware of this sensitivity, allowed the Jews to coin their own nonidolatrous copper money, which sufficed for normal everyday business; there was no need for them to carry the silver denarius, a coin of higher value. And Jesus apparently did not have one - but they did, and in the holy precincts of the temple at that! Well, then, if they were using the emperor's (idolatrous) coinage, they could hardly object to paying his tax. The verb in v.21, "give back to the emperor" neatly presses the point and underlines Jesus' description of them as "hypocrites" (v.18).<sup>20</sup>

We shouldn't miss the primary point of His response which was to give back to God what is God's. We saw in the three previous parables that God is the ruler, and they had a responsibility to give Him His owed payments (fruits).

## **THE CHALLENGE OF THE SADDUCEES (Matthew 22:23-32/ Mark 12:18-27/ Luke 20:27-40)**

The Sadducees were notorious for having theological disagreements with the Pharisees, whether in the belief in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). Their primary point of incongruity was on the topic of the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection from the dead and decided to use their pet doctrine to confront the Lord Jesus. They questioned Him based upon a portion in Deuteronomy 25:5 where Moses issues one of the sundry laws on the topic of widows.

When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.  
(Deuteronomy 25:5)

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<sup>19</sup> The NT teaches that God appointed the leaders that are over Christians and that we should respect them (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17) and pray for them and live quiet lives with them (1 Timothy 2:1-2). This doesn't necessitate that we should obey them without any discrimination. We are to obey God before man and if an attempt to force us to worship other gods, we should quietly rebel against them (Revelation 2-3).

<sup>20</sup> France Page 830

The law stated that if a married man died and didn't have a son to take care of his widowed mother that the brother of the deceased had a responsibility to marry her (Deut. 25:6-10). He was also to take care of her and provide a family for her. Their scenario then conflagrates the situation by adding multiple deaths and multiple marriages. Finally, the wife in their parable dies and they ask the Lord whose wife of the seven will she be in the resurrection? Their purpose in this scenario is to demonstrate how foolish the resurrection is and in return to discredit those who believe in it including the Lord Jesus.

The response from the Lord Jesus is to fundamentally critique their understanding of scripture and the law<sup>21</sup>. They didn't understand the scriptures nor the power of God and had not having read what was spoken to them by God. The foundational point was that they lacked an understanding of the Words of God and were reading much more into this text than warranted. Firstly, the Lord's answer clearly indicates that He believes in a resurrection. Secondly, He explains that the state of a man or woman in the resurrection is not the same as state on earth. Those enjoying that age will no longer be given in marriage and our earthly marriage will no longer be relevant. These marriages are temporary and focused upon this age. He follows up with a quotation from Exodus 3:6: "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" to answer their ill-informed argument. Notice that prior to the quotation, the Lord Jesus states that the scriptures were written/spoken "to you", Israel and its leaders. The covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not a God whose relationship with them ceases at death but continues even in the afterlife. To understand the power of God is to not question His ability to raise the dead but also His purpose in granting everlasting life, to His children of promise.

Their attempt to discredit Him demonstrates their lack of faith and their rejection in the coming Messiah. They were so interested in the law and debate that they missed what the OT described as the Messiah to the extent where they didn't recognize that He was standing right in front of them. While they claimed to know the law, they lacked an understanding of the fulfillment of the OT texts which they held so dear.

## **THE SECOND CHALLENGE OF THE PHARISEES (Matthew 22:34-40/ Mark 12:28-31)**

The Sadducees failed to trap the Lord with their primary theological topic of interest and their rivals, the Pharisees, were not prepared to give up just yet on discrediting the Lord Jesus. The crowds were amazed by His answers, and opposite of their intentions, they were winning the people over to Him. *They gathered themselves together* indicates the continuation of their scheme to smear Him and draw the crowds away. An unnamed lawyer approached the Lord with a question to *test* Him again. The question seems innocent when we first read it but ultimately the motive was less than pure. The question posed by the Sadducees was based upon an interpretation of the law and the Pharisees decide to follow-up with another Mosaic law question. This unnamed lawyer (scribe) raised the question on which of the

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<sup>21</sup> The Sadducees probably had an alternate interpretation of texts that clearly teach the resurrection in the OT such as Isaiah 26:19 & Daniel 12:2.

commandments of the law is the greatest of all<sup>22</sup>. The Lord replies with a pointed answer in quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 which would have been commonly known among them and the crowd.

The text in Deuteronomy focuses upon the person of God and the imperative to love Him with all our heart, soul and mind (Mark adds strength)<sup>23</sup>. This was the actual answer to the question posed by the lawyer however the Lord Jesus furthers the response with a second great commandment. Not only were they to love God but by necessity they were commanded to love their neighbour as themselves. One cannot say that he loves God but in return hates his neighbour (1 John 4:20 -21). He summarizes His response to His opponents; the law and prophets hangs upon this principle. His words were not meant to abolish the law but to demonstrate that the law was fulfilled in doing it with the mindset of loving God and loving one's neighbour. The Pharisees had focused upon other motives for keeping the law instead of *justice, mercy and faithfulness* (23:23). The same principle He previously taught in *treating people the same way you want to be treated* (7:12). When reading the tablets of the law, one could easily discern that it is summarized in our inward and outward affections toward God and men. The Pharisees had missed this and in return were placing burdens upon others which they refused to fulfil. Much like the Sadducees, they had not truly read what was spoken to them by God!

In Mark's gospel, the lawyer responds to the words of the Lord Jesus by confirming that he understood His answer by expressing to Him that the summary of the commandments is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33). This lawyer had understood that all the laws of the Torah flowed from this principle to which the Lord answers that the Kingdom was not far from him.

## **WHO'S SON IS THE MESSIAH? (Matthew 22:41-46/ Mark 12:35-37/ Luke 20:41-44)**

While much of the temple encounter was focused upon their confrontation with the Lord Jesus, it was now His turn to question them. They attempted to expose Him as an unreliable false teacher but failed to trap Him and depict Him in such a way. This time, the Lord asks them a question to accomplish what they failed to do, demonstrate their unbelief and also expose them to the temple crowd. They attempted to bring into disrepute His authority and now He was going to expose theirs.

The Pharisees were once again "gathered together" but at this point they ceased to question Him. They focused upon political questions, the resurrection and Mosaic Commandments but ignored His primary claim. The original reason for their public attack on Him was due to the children's shouting of *Hosanna to the Son of David* (21:15). The central point of their contention against Him was that He wouldn't silence or rebuke the children's chants. The Lord now poses a question to them: *What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?* All previous parables contained the character of "a son", and the Lord was returning to this notion by linking it with the Messiah. They answered correctly in stating that the Messiah would be the son of David which was the title given to Jesus by the children. The Pharisees

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<sup>22</sup> There were some who calculated that there was a total of 613 commandments in the Torah.

<sup>23</sup> Note that Mark's quotation added *shema* (Deut. 6:4) at the beginning of the address.

were familiar with the Messiah coming from the branch of David who would reign as king and bring justice and righteousness to the earth and save Israel (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 11:1-10). Jesus follows up with a second question: *how does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?* It's important to note that the question doesn't render the concept of the Messiah incompatible in identifying the Lord Jesus as the Son of David *But the argument to be not that the title is wrong, but it is inadequate: the Messiah is more than David's son, he is his lord.*<sup>24</sup> The fact that David called the Messiah "Lord" demonstrates that David believed that He would be an even greater king than himself. David was considered the greatest of the kings of Israel and to surpass his legacy, one would need to possess a greater kingdom. Jesus wouldn't simply be sitting on the throne of David on earth but would reign over a greater kingdom that was coming when He would sit at the right hand of the Father, the place of honour, on Yahweh's throne after His resurrection and ascension. The Lord Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1 and states that David wrote it *in the Spirit* so as to say that it wasn't from his own inclination, but it came from a divine proclamation (Acts 2:30). David looked to one greater than himself (Lord)! This Messiah that David looked forward to would be his king! The text is used elsewhere as a testimony to establish Jesus as Messiah (Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13, 10:13). These religious leaders were confronting the promised King, one whom David would have bowed to if alive in those days. He brought an even greater kingdom with Him and that Kingdom will one day have taken over the whole earth!

The Lord Jesus is left without an answer from the Pharisees or anyone in the crowd. They failed to recognize Him as the Messiah and no other opportunity would be afforded to them. No other questions will be asked but will follow with a list of condemning realities upon the religious leader all the way to chapter 24.

### **THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS EXPOSED (Matthew 23:1-12)**

The public challenge to the authority of Jesus as Messiah in front of the crowds was meant to dissuade them from following Him. Now, the tables are turned, and the Lord Jesus will begin a lengthy diatribe upon the religious leaders. Like a lawyer presenting evidence in a trial, the Lord exposes the hypocrisy of these leaders and how they had failed in keeping the law as well as fallen short of their responsibilities as leaders to the people. In return, this revealing of their hypocrisy demonstrates clearly how they had failed to produce the fruits that should accompany repentance. In the opening twelve verses of this chapter, the Lord will speak to the crowds and to His disciples regarding the duplicity of the religious leaders followed by a direct address to the religious leaders themselves in vs. 13-33.

The Lord begins by pointing out that these Scribes and Pharisees seated themselves in Moses' chair and tells the crowd that, while they are hypocrites, they say true things about the law. The office of the religious leaders meant that they were held accountable to properly teach the law given by God through Moses. Whether this is a metaphorical seat, or it was a literal stone seat in front the synagogues where

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<sup>24</sup> France P 848

the authoritative teacher sat<sup>25</sup>, it represents the religious leaders taken on this position on their own accord. Those who did so, seated themselves in the chair of Moses. The Lord doesn't dissuade the crowds from following the content of the teaching since it came from God but warned of the manner in which the religious leaders followed it. The crowd was warned not to be like them since they lay burdens on others, burdens they refuse to help those who were collapsing under these strict laws attain. They were inconsistent and spewed out law without grace.

Behind their legalistic comportment, were impure motives. All their religious practices were not meant for the glory of God but for recognition, flattery, and an obsessive desire for the respect from men. Their outward demonstrations of piety were intended for their own benefit rather than the benefit of others. Wearing the phylacteries<sup>26</sup> were made broad to showcase their piousness, lengthening their tassels of their fancy shawls<sup>27</sup> to draw attention to their devoutness to prayer, all because they love the place of honour, liked to be greeted with respect and called by the revered title "rabbi" by society. They sought the "good life" of being adored and reaping the privileges that came secularly and religiously.

The Lord Jesus then calls upon the crowd and especially His disciples who were listening to distinguish themselves from them, not from their teaching as in vs. 3, but from seeking titles and man-centered glory. He calls upon them to avoid being called "rabbi" and to look to their Messiah as their sole teacher<sup>28</sup>. In return, they were to treat each other equally as brothers. They were to forego the desire for a special status and work together as a family unit. The Lord also stresses that they shouldn't be called "father" since only God was to be called their father. Some had abused this title as a means of gaining an authority over others to which this authority belongs to God and Him alone<sup>29</sup>. Don't be called "leader" (teacher) since they should view the Messiah as leader. They were to avoid vain recognition from men and work the fruits of the kingdom as servants. The greatest of them would be unlike what their current culture dictated which allowed the religious leaders their prestige, the greatest of the kingdom would be the one who serves others and the one who exalts himself would be humbled.

While the people in Jerusalem recognized the leaders as men of authority who had placed themselves in a position of power and sole interpreters of the law of Moses, the Pharisees & Sadducees were hypocrites seeking the gain of prestige and religious honour while failing to care for those same people who were entrusted to their care.

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<sup>25</sup> Carson notes that synagogues had a stone seat at the front where the authoritative teacher, usually a grammateus ("teacher of the law") sat. Moreover, "to sit on X's seat" often means "to succeed X"... This would imply that the "teachers of the law" are Moses' legal successors, possessing all his authority - a view the scribes themselves held (Carson P. 472)

<sup>26</sup> Phylacteries were from the text of Deuteronomy 6:8 & 11:18 were leather boxes with key texts from the Torah which they wore on their arm and forehead.

<sup>27</sup> See Numbers 15:38-39; Deuteronomy 22:12

<sup>28</sup> France makes an interesting point in asking: *Does the elimination of human "teachers" allude to the ideal situation which Jeremiah foresaw under the new covenant when "they will no longer teach one another..."* (Jeremiah 31:34; cf. Isa 54:13)? (France n 37, page 863) seeing that they will be taught of the Lord?

<sup>29</sup> It's important to note that the term "fathers" is used of the OT saints as a term of respect and it was used by Paul on two occasions to identify himself as the one who had brought someone to faith (1 Corinthians 4:15; Philemon 10)

## THE SEVEN WOES (Matthew 23:13-33)

The Lord Jesus now turns His attention directly towards the religious leaders to address them personally. His demeanour is direct and echoes the demeanour of a judge casting a condemning verdict upon them. His decree came in the form of seven inescapable woes of condemning. A woe is a curse placed upon the head of an individual for an act they had committed. These afflictions would have been well-known by the religious leaders considering their OT background and the previous references to Isaiah 5:8-23<sup>30</sup>. The first two woes are focused upon the "who" they were destroying, woe 3-4 focused upon "how" they were deceiving others and themselves. Woe 5-6 aimed at their hypocrisy and inner state while the 7th woe was the crescendo for their guilt.

The first woe ascribed to the Pharisees and scribes' guilt for shutting off the kingdom of heaven from people. To enter the kingdom of heaven was equal to entering salvation, both reliant upon receiving Jesus as their Messianic King. The verb "shut off" seems to indicate something that they were continuously doing which possibly could be referring to what was said in vs. 4. They persuaded the people not to follow the Lord Jesus and the success of this mission will be demonstrated at His trial. The second woe indicates that the limitation of their *shutting off the kingdom* wasn't restricted to Israelites but extended to people of other nations. The expression "*travel on land and sea*" seems to point to a form of aggressive missionary work to convert people from far way. A proselyte was a convert to Judaism who adhered to its practices and ethics<sup>31</sup>. The problem was that these converts were being lead to their own school of Judaism rather than the kingdom of heaven. *They were winning them to their own position. The converts in view, therefore, are not converts to Judaism but to Pharisaism*<sup>32</sup>. The expression "twice as much a son of hell (gehenna) as yourselves" is challenging. Most commentators seem to point to the fact that through the teaching of the Pharisees, these converts became even more aggressive than their teachers and perhaps alludes to their own spread of Pharisee teaching.

The following woe is a lengthy charge on the question of taking oaths. The Lord refers to them as "blind guides" which translates to foolish teachers who can't see the reality of what they're teaching. Their oath taking became a thoughtless display of their traditions and its supposed OT parallels. They constantly confused the identity of the greater item to swear upon. In Matthew 5:33-37, the Lord deals with oath taking and its seriousness whether swearing by the temple, the items within the temple or heaven, since the danger is that it eventually leads to swearing upon God Himself. It was the character of the individual and telling of the truth that were the important elements.

The Lord then moves to the principle of tithing. This rule is laid out in the OT (Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:22) which required a tenth of their produce including herbs such as mint, dill and

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<sup>30</sup> The assignment of a woe was placed upon certain cities (Matthew 11:21-24), those who cause others to stumble ( Matthew 18:7) and for Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:24).

<sup>31</sup> See Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43

<sup>32</sup> Carson P. 478

cummin' to be offered to God. This, in of itself, was fulfilling the legal requirements of the Mosaic law but, while they didn't transgress the law, they were guilty of lifting these external requirements over "the weightier provisions" or the central issues of the law. The things that mattered most were the things that would have aided those who were under their care. While they claimed to believe in justice, mercy<sup>33</sup> and faithfulness, none of these were extended to the people and the emphasis of their religious affections were based upon less-important principles of the law. With their misguided accentuation of the law, they strain out a gnat and swallow camel, the smaller unclean creature becomes the largest unclean creature.

The Lord Jesus now moves to the root of the problem in that these religious leaders, while focusing on cleaning the external part of the vessel, through their external deeds, have missed that internal cleansing. They lacked the wisdom to know that an inner cleaning is required to legitimize their external acts. There needed to be an internal washing of their hearts to purify themselves of such things as their robbery and self-indulgence. A repent heart produces justice, mercy, and faithfulness so that their external acts such as tithing would have any meaning. In the 6th woe, the Lord continues the topic of internal versus the external. These religious leaders are compared to a whitewashed tomb. Tombs in the 1st century were marked with a lime-plaster. *The marking of graves with lime-plaster was intended not so much for cosmetic purposes as to warn people against touching them and contracting uncleanness*<sup>34</sup>. Their appearance was of something quite beautiful but inside it was full of dead men's bones. The law forbade anyone from coming into contact with a dead body or bones (Numbers 19:11-22). While they seemed like the pinnacle of religious purity in their societal circles, especially the crowds, the Lord exposes judges them as hypocrites and lawless men (those who had failed to see the true will of God).

The 7th woe is the most severe of them all. They outwardly portrayed themselves as respecting the prophets of old by building them beautiful tombs and monuments to honour them. Their duplicity extends to a verbal affirmation and declaration that they would not have participated with their ancestors to murder the prophets of old. They claim that they would have opposed the kings who put them to death yet, in their day, they had rejected John the Baptist and they would be the main instigators in the death of the sinless Son of God. He commands these frauds to "*fill up, then the measure of the guilt of your fathers*" (V.32) signifying the guilt they would impute upon themselves for the upcoming participation in the murder of the sinless Son of God. Kik comments:

The picture is that of a cup nearly filled and now being filled to overflowing by the present generation of Jews. National sin, accumulated over many centuries, had been trying the patience of God. Again, and again the Jews had sinned against their God and forsaken him for idols. God had manifested to them His forbearance and longsuffering and had pleaded with the Jews to repent and return unto him. Now, with the rejection of his Son and the crucifixion

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<sup>33</sup> Hosea 6:6

<sup>34</sup> France P. 876

approaching, the patience of God had come to an end. The cup of sin through this greatest of all crimes would overflow and bring upon the nation the terrible stroke of divine judgment<sup>35</sup>.

The cup of their sins would run over, and God's wrath would come to judge them in that generation!

The term "brood of vipers" would have been familiar to some religious leaders as coming from the mouth of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7). While John asks who told them to escape the wrath the come, the Lord is more explicit to ask how they will escape the sentence of hell (gehenna).

### **UPON THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WOULD THE GUILT FALL (Matthew 23:34-36)**

Following the 7th woe, the Lord moves from their past association with the death of the prophets to their present/future participation. The term "sending" is in the present tense while the killing, crucifying, scourging, and persecuting are all actions in the future tense. Prophets, wise men, and scribes would be sent "to you", those specific religious leaders. The language of the persecution of the messengers resembles the Lord's words to the disciples in 10:17-23 of what would happen to them<sup>36</sup>. The guilt of the blood spilt in the death of the prophets whether past, present or in the not-too-distant future would fall upon "you"<sup>37</sup>. The responsibility for these murders and those to come will fall upon those who live in "this generation".

The blood of Abel (Genesis 4:8) and Zechariah<sup>38</sup> were both murders that required retribution. The justice for the deaths of God's messengers would fall upon those standing in the temple with Christ that day and the city of Jerusalem (23:37). The term "this generation" is consistently used throughout the gospel of Matthew of those who were living in the first century. His coming in judgment would be witnessed by those standing with Him (Matthew 16:28) and even states to the members of the Sanhedrin during His trial that they would witness His coming (Matthew 26:46). Their reprisal will be confirmed in the following verses with the destruction of Jerusalem by the roman armies in A.D. 70.

### **THE LAMENTATION FOR JERUSALEM & THE DESOLATE HOUSE (Matthew 23:37-39)**

In the previous condemnations, The Lord focused primarily upon the religious leaders and now moves to expand His audience to the broader term "this generation". He now develops even further His focus by

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<sup>35</sup> An Eschatology of Victory, J. Marcellus Kik, P 79-80

<sup>36</sup> This may have included Stephen (Acts 7:58-59) and James (Acts 12:1-2)

<sup>37</sup> The idea of judgment coming upon (taking responsibility) is similar to 2 Samuel 1:16; Jonah 1:14

<sup>38</sup> The challenge with Zechariah is that he is called the son of Berechiah while the individual better suited in this reference would be Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24 who was murdered and the son of Jehoiada. He was the last martyr referred to in the Masoretic texts. Commentators are not in agreement as to the identity of Zechariah. The son of Berechiah was Zechariah the prophet (Zechariah 1:1) yet we are not told how he died but he could be identified as the last of the prophets who was killed.

addressing Jerusalem as a whole including the temple. He identifies the city in like manner to the religious leaders as those who kill and stone the prophets. Jesus came as their Messiah and while He appealed to the crowds to accept Him like a hen gathers her chicks<sup>39</sup>, the intervention of the religious leaders would result in the rejection of the Messiah and judgment upon their city and temple.

In V. 38, the Lord Jesus explicitly states the judgment would fall upon *your house*. Note the switch from the earlier expression *My house* (Matthew 21:13) to now it being left to them. *Furthermore, this seems intentionally intended to reflect God's statement to Jeremiah: "I have forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have given the beloved of My soul Into the hand of her enemies". (Jeremiah 12:7)*<sup>40</sup>. This is unquestionably a reference to the temple but certainly could extend to the people as well as the city. France observes that:

In that case there is a sad irony in that what was described in 21:13 as God's house is not "your house", and it has been left "to you" because God has abandoned it, as Jesus himself is about to do in 24:1<sup>41</sup>.

This house would be left to them desolate through the judgment to come just a few years later. When the Lord Jesus entered the city, those following Him were laying their coats and branches before Him and shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*". These very same people who would choose Barabbas over Him and call for His crucifixion.

The expression *I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'*" is challenging. Some have argued that this statement predicts a restoration of the city and its people and how they will eventually be restored the day that they see Him at His 2nd coming. The phrase however is not of a predictive nature but seems to point to an indefinite condition.

There is no prediction here, only a condition. Or, rather, the only prediction is an emphatic negative, "from now on you will certainly not see me," to which the following "until" clause provides the only possible exception. They will not see him again until they welcome him, but the indefinite phrasing of the second clause gives no assurance that such a welcome will ever be forthcoming<sup>42</sup>.

We should remember that these are Jesus' last words offered to the religious leaders and to the crowd. The next time Jesus is in Jerusalem will be for His trial and scourging prior to being lead to His death at Golgotha.

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<sup>39</sup> France points to the OT imagery such as Psalm 17:8; 91:4; Isaiah 31:5

<sup>40</sup> The Olivet Discourse Made Easy, Kenneth L. Gentry, Victorious Hope Publishing, 2010, Page 35

<sup>41</sup> France P. 884

<sup>42</sup> France P. 885

## Part 2: The Olivet Discourse

### INTRODUCTION

The following texts in Matthew 24-25 form one of the most comprehensive eschatological overview in the gospels. The Olivet discourse deals with the eschatological outlook of our Lord Jesus directly from His view of things. Many have interpreted the following scriptures as identifying the 2nd coming as the bulk of the discourse while others see a mixture of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 along with the 2nd coming. With that said, most futurist interpreters traditionally construe these texts in the former although acknowledging that some could be pertaining to the destruction of the temple but minimally. Still, others would argue for a dual fulfillment of these texts in both the temple's fall and a future destruction of a temple in Jerusalem at the end of history. In this review, I will explore the idea that the discourse if fulfilled in A.D. 70 (24:4-35) while the latter part will be fulfilled in the 2nd coming.

### TEARING DOWN THE TEMPLE STONES (Matthew 24:1-2/ Mark 13:1-2/ Luke 21:5-6)

After the end of His encounter with the religious leaders, the Lord Jesus "came out" and "was going away" from the temple. His entrance was one that sent a message to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the long-awaited Messiah had arrived while His exodus from the temple pointed to the rejection of those who refused to have Him as their Messiah. Their house was left to them desolate! The presence of God in the person of the Son left the temple and in return judgment would fall upon the structures of the great city much in the same way of the glory of Yahweh leaving the temple and stood over the mountain which is to the east (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23).

The disciples admired the stones and the buildings from afar (Mark 13:1). It's beauty and grandeur were remarkable to the human eye. This was the place where men came to worship the true God and His presence dwelt among those walls for centuries. The structure was a marvel of the world. Josephus describes it as:

Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were coming to it at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Flavius Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5:222-223

The Lord Jesus then makes a shocking prediction in the statement that *"not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down"*. This was undoubtedly a perplexing statement keeping in mind the strength and beauty of the temple as well as their understanding of the presence of Yahweh<sup>44</sup>. The stones were incredibly large, and the structure would have seemed impenetrable. To think that all these stones would be demolished and the city with its constructs destroyed was simply unimaginable. Yet, the historical fact of its demise is unquestionable. The Roman Armies under general Titus destroyed Herod's temple in A.D. 70 and desecrated it to the extent that today there is little left of the structures. Josephus writes of this event:

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay, or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury: (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done:) Cæsar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city, and temple: but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency, that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne: and so much of the wall as inclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison: as were the towers also spared in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valour had subdued. But for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground, by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to, by the madness of those that were for innovations. A city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.<sup>45</sup>

Not only would the destruction of the temple have been a travesty, the downfall of the temple also meant the cutting-off of the centrality of Jewish worship and life. It meant that sacrifices could no longer be offered and the presence of God leaving the temple and its city. It meant a true devastation to their entire way of life! How shocking must it have been to receive this message! The message was clear enough however, that the followers of Christ were also preaching a similar message of coming judgment to the crowds which became one of the primary charges to condemn them to death (Acts 6:13-14).

## **THE QUESTIONS FROM THE DISCIPLES (Matthew 24:3/ Mark 13:3-4/ Luke 21:7)**

While sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to inquire of Jesus about the disturbing statement He had just made<sup>46</sup>. They ask: *"Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* The context of their question came from His earlier comments surrounding the temple and its desolation. It's important to remember that the temple that they were referring to was not a temple in the future but the temple standing before their eyes on that day. Their probing fits into two categories mainly upon "when" will those things happen and "what" will

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<sup>44</sup> Note the similarities to the destruction of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 9:6-9; Micah 3:12; Jeremiah 7:11-14, 26:1-23 which also happened in 586 B.C.

<sup>45</sup> Flavius Josephus, Jewish Wars, Book VII, Chapter 1.1

<sup>46</sup> Mark's rendition has Peter, James, John and Andrew posing the question to Him.

be the sign of His coming and the end of the age. They are looking for a timing and an indicator that He was on His way. In Mark's gospel, the final part of the question is focused upon *when* "these things" rather than the coming at the end of the age while Luke is more inline with Matthew. Keeping in mind the previous context (Matthew 21-23), we know that a judgment was issued upon the religious leaders. They would be the ones on whom would *fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah*. We also know that something was coming in the form of a judgment against the temple and the city. It was *their* house which would be left to them desolate and Christ's lament was for "Jerusalem". The disciples were obviously surprised by these statements (Mark 13:1) which prompted them to ask two questions to clarify the timeframe of the desolation of the house and the signs of the end of the age. The disciples, entrenched in the Jewish teachings of their day, saw the temple as the centrality of Judaism but probably also related it to the coming of the promised Kingdom. If this symbol of their religious life was truly going to be destroyed, surely this had to be the end of the age and surely it would come with signs and wonders!

Understanding these two questions and how the Lord answers them is crucial to the whole discourse. Many theologians are agreed that the answer is focused upon the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the 2nd coming of Christ albeit there are still some who render the discourse as entirely fulfilled in 70 A.D.<sup>47</sup> or entirely at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming<sup>48</sup>. The problem lies in how to divide Matthew 24 all the way to Matthew 25:46 based upon the questions posed by the disciples. Which texts are referring to answering the *when* and which address the *what*? While not perfect, I believe that the best way to divide the discourse is to allow 24:3-35 to speak of the coming of Christ to judge the temple which He forsook in Chapters 21-23 while letting 24:36 onward to speak of the 2nd coming of Christ. There seems to be a transition at v.36 which we will address in a future section.

Sitting on the Mount of Olives, the Lord and the disciples would have had a scenic view of the temple and its many buildings. The landscape along with the term "these things" which identifies those things previously spoken of, render unquestionably the inquiry about the destruction of the temple. Matthew introduces the term "parousia" (coming) to the two questions to identify that the response of the Lord wasn't focused only upon the temple but also regarding when He would come. We must keep in mind that there are two distinct terms that will associate themselves with the translated term "coming"<sup>49</sup>. But what prompted the disciples to ask about His parousia based upon the preceding texts? France believes that "*perhaps we may assume an undefined sense that so cataclysmic an event as the destruction of the temple must usher in the end of the present world order*"<sup>50</sup>. In other words, the disciples could not envision the destruction of the temple without the ultimate end to history through the return of their Messianic king. They confused the destruction of the temple with the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ and in return

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<sup>47</sup> Hyper-Preterists would understand the entire discourse and even the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ as fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>48</sup> Classic Dispensationalists do not believe Matthew is dealing with the first temple, but that the entire discourse is about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and a future temple. They believe that Luke's rendition actually addresses the 1<sup>st</sup> century temple while Matthew ignores it.

<sup>49</sup> The term *Parousia* and the other *Erchomai*. We'll note the difference between the "sign of your coming (Parousia) and the sign of the Son of Man in His coming (erchomai) in v.30.

<sup>50</sup> France P. 895

with the end of the world<sup>51</sup>. The Lord is correcting the assumption of the disciples since there would be a coming in judgment against the temple and a physical coming in judgment against the nations at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The words *end of the age* is challenging. What age is the Lord referring to? While there are various opinions to this age that will come to an end, I will interpret this in association with the parousia in the distant future<sup>52</sup>. Another important observation is that the term “end” (*sunteleia*) is utilized while in the rest of the discourse, the term “Telos” is used for “end”<sup>53</sup>. The response to that question later in the discourse is probably corrective to show that the destruction of the temple wasn’t necessarily the end of history. The phrase is found elsewhere in Matthew (Matthew 13:39) and conveys the idea of a judgment at the end of human history when the final harvest happens, and the tares are gathered for their final judgment.

### THE WARNINGS (Matthew 24:4-8)

It's important to note that, from the beginning of the response to their inquiry, the Lord addresses them as "you" (2nd person plural) not “you” (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural). This wasn’t a vague group of people that no one could identify. He addresses them directly and explicitly focuses His discourse upon them personally. They are warned not to allow others to deceive them and in return to stay focused upon what He was about to share with them. Interestingly, while the following texts are meant to inform the disciples on how *not* to be misled, and what signs wouldn’t call for the end, in many prophetic writings and presentations, these are the signs that these authors are looking for. Regular world events such as earthquakes, plagues, wars and famines are pointed out as the sign of His coming and cause many today to make speculations that those signs indicate that the end is within just a few years.

The first warning is to beware of those who would come "in my name" proclaiming to be the Christ. There would be those false Christs who would desire to lead many astray. France points out that *"He would be coming "in Jesus' name" not because he is impersonating Jesus but because he is claiming the role and title which properly belong to Jesus.*<sup>54</sup> Some would claim authority belonging to the Messiah and in return deceive many. In a time when the Jewish people were occupied by the Romans, they were looking for their Messiah to conquer the invaders and reign such as in the days of King David. There was

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<sup>51</sup> The confusion of the disciples was not an infrequent issue. They were often confused about the Lord’s words whether on the fact that He was going to die or in regard to His resurrection.

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that not all commentators agree that the end of the age is a reference to the end of history. Many able bible scholars render the expression as the end of the Jewish age. This would associate the destruction of the temple with the end of the OT era and the temple sacrifices. The argument is that until A.D. 70, the OT was simply in the process of fading away (Hebrews 8:13) until its climactic end with the destruction of the temple & city.

<sup>53</sup> Gentry points out that Matthew uses *sunteleia* only in relation to the end of the world such as Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3, 28:20. He points out that *"Despite common assumptions the word telos does not necessarily speak of the end of history. In fact, its lexical meaning highlights the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome" (BADG 998). That is, it speaks of the conclusion to any particular movement, not just the end of historical development...Matthew appears to distinguish sunteleia from telos by reserving sunteleia as his distinctive term for eschatological end, the goal of history."* (The Olivet Discourse Made Easy, Kenneth L. Gentry, Victorious Hope Publishing, 2010, Pages 47-48)

<sup>54</sup> France P. 902

a real “Messianic emotionalism” to finally see Israel victorious over its enemies through the leadership of the promised anointed one. It would have been easy for a believer to be deceived by the Messianic fever. During the times prior to the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, tensions had become high, and many were declaring themselves as the coming saviour of Israel. These false Messiahs were in the same category as false prophets and with the winds of war blowing, frantic people were claiming this authority. Many were presenting themselves prior to the siege<sup>55</sup>. We will evaluate this further when we examine vs.23-24.

The PAX ROMANA (Roman Peace) was a period of freedom from strife beginning in the reign of Augustus (27 B.C. - 14 A.D.) and ending with the rule of Marcus roughly around 161 A.D. This was a period of relative peace throughout the Roman Empire:

This 200-year period saw unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the Empire, which spanned from England in the north to Morocco in the south and Iraq in the east. During the Pax Romana, the Roman Empire reached its peak in terms of land area, and its population swelled to an estimated 70 million people. Nevertheless, Rome's citizens were relatively secure, and the government generally maintained law, order, and stability. The Pax Romana began when Octavian became the leader of the Roman Empire.<sup>56</sup>

With that said, the coming of Nero certainly disrupted that peace for a time just prior to the siege of Jerusalem. Gentry writes:

Nero (lived: AD 37-68; ruled AD 54-68) is the emperor who formally engaged the Jewish War that results in the destruction of the temple stone by stone. In his Olivet Discourse, the Lord is giving signs for the temple's destruction (Matt 24:2-3). These signs really begin to erupt in a world-shaking manner when Nero dies in the midst of the Jewish War (June AD 68). At Nero's death, the Pax Romana is severely breached. At that time the Roman Civil Wars erupted, including the turbulent “Year of Four Emperors” (June AD 68- June AD 69). In fact, the turmoil of this period is so severe that it almost leads to the collapse of the Roman Empire<sup>57</sup>.

The Lord Jesus spoke these words during this time (PAX ROMANA) but the rising tension between those who were revolting against their roman masters was increasing. It was a bold statement when uttered since there were no real wars looming in those days. The Zealot's revolt only began in 66 A.D. This uprising could easily have been seen as a war to end all wars for these Galileans. As we'll see, large roman legions were brought in to suppress the revolts and brought trouble for the masses in Israel. The Lord exhorts them that in seeing these things, that they should not fear that the end has arrived since these wars and rumours of wars would be present in their generation<sup>58</sup> but the "end" would not come until the gospel would be preached in the whole world (v.14). The Lord furthers the description of the

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<sup>55</sup> Gentry lists a total of 16 potential candidates prior to AD 70 – See The Olivet Discourse Made Easy P. 67-68

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.ushistory.org/civ/6c.asp>

<sup>57</sup> The Olivet Discourse Made Easy, Kenneth Gentry, Victorious Hope Publishing, 2010, Pages 71-72

<sup>58</sup> An argument has been made that "end" in v.6 refers to the "end of the age" in v.3 however two different words are used for end: συντέλεια (v.3) and τέλος (v.6)

war and rumour of wars in *nation rising up against nation and kingdom against kingdom*. Political unrest between rivalries should not alarm them.

The Lord advances His exhortation by explaining that even earthquakes and famines shouldn't sway their focus. We know that there were many great earthquakes in the next few years including in Asia Minor (A.D. 61), Italy (A.D. 62) and even in Jerusalem (A.D. 67).

Tacitus mentions earthquakes in Crete, Rome, Apamea, Phrygia, Campania, Laodicea (of Revelation fame) and Pompeii during the time just before Jerusalem's destruction. Severe earthquakes plague the reigns of the Emperors Caligula (AD37-41) and Claudius (AD 41-54). According to Seneca (ca. 4 BC -AD 65), others occur in Asia, Achaia, Syria, and Macedonia<sup>59</sup>.

The commonality of earthquakes in during that season at least can explain why the Lord exhort them not to fall into the trap of being deceived. It should also be noted that the book of Acts records two more local earthquakes (Acts 16:26) and let's not forget the great earthquake in Jerusalem in Matthew 27:51 at the crucifixion of the Lord.

These disciples would also experience severe famines in their lifetime. We note that Luke records a great famine all over the world during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28) and Josephus records this during the rule of Claudius also:

Nay, further, a little before the beginning of this war, when Claudius was emperor of the Romans, and Ismael was our high priest, and when so great a famine was come upon us, that onetenth deal [of wheat] was sold for four drachmae, (Antiquities 3.320)<sup>60</sup>

These presages would not spell the end itself but would be like *birth pangs* pointing to the coming of the end and in return the coming of a new birth. The OT refers to birth pangs as suffering of a city or a nation (Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 6:24; 22:23; Micah 4:9-10) and a parallel can be found in Isaiah 26:17-18. In John's gospel, the Lord Jesus utilizes the example of a woman's labour to express the sorrow they would feel in His death and the joy they'd experience in His resurrection. *Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.* (John 16:21-22). A New Covenant, New Jerusalem and a New Temple would be ushered in shortly after these words were uttered and the Old would fade away (Hebrews 8:13).

## **THE DISCIPLES' SUFFERING & BETRAYAL (Matthew 24:9-10)**

The term "then" seems to guide us through a loose chronological order to link the wars, famines and earthquakes with the persecution of the disciples<sup>61</sup>. These and other disciples (3rd person plural "you")

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<sup>59</sup> The Olivet Discourse Made Easy, Kenneth Gentry, Victorious Hope Publishing, 2010, Pages 75

<sup>60</sup> Also see 20.51-53;101.

will be "delivered", which echoes the outcomes of the life of John the Baptist, Jesus, and many of His followers. This would include suffering and death which the Lord previously warned they would encounter if they were willing to follow Him. Matthew is thinking further ahead than Mark and Luke who seem to focus this section more upon the persecution in Jerusalem at the hands of the Jewish leaders, roman governors, and Herod (Mark 13:9). The apostles experienced persecution at the hands of their fellow countrymen on many occasions<sup>62</sup>. He could be looking to the missionary work of the apostle Paul to the inhabited roman world (Gentile Nations) just a few short years later. One can see this persecution at its height just prior to the destruction of the city at the hands of Nero, who persecuted the Christians from November AD 64 – June AD 68 in some of the most barbaric ways. The main emphasis however is that all this suffering will be "because of My name". The name of Jesus Christ would invoke such a hatred from sinners that it would lead to the persecution and martyrdom of His followers. The gospel goes out into a hostile world and the world doesn't want it nor do they want Jesus as their king<sup>63</sup>.

While it could be expected that those opposed to the message of the Kingdom of the Messiah would oppress them, the true watch should come from those within. During the time of this persecution, many who professed Christ and a brotherhood with believers would fall away and betray them (hand them over). This was not merely an abandonment of the faith but a literal betrayal where trusted believers would betray them in the same way as Judas betrayed Jesus in the garden.

### **MISLEADING FALSE PROPHETS AND THE COLD LOVE (Matthew 24:11-12)**

The warning of the Lord continues with cautioning the disciples to look out for false prophets. Prophets were considered men appointed by God who were responsible to represent Him in communicating a message to the people, yet a false prophet would bring a false message and a dishonest claim to represent God. These false representatives would lead the people of God into the opposite direction of God's will and law. The OT is full of warnings against being prudent of the works and tactics of false prophets and to avoid them (Isaiah 9:15; Jeremiah 14:13-14; 23:14, 25-26; 27:15; Ezekiel 13:9; 22:28). In the same way that they were warned not to be misled by false Messiahs, they were equally warned to take heed of being misled by coming false prophets. These two categories of deceivers will come "showing great signs" (Matthew 24:24) and, even, if possible, deceive those of the elect. The NT seems to point to its fulfillment by those within the Christian church (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29-30) and that within just a few short years after these words were uttered. Peter records of false prophets that had arose among the people (2 Peter 2:1-3) and the apostle Paul also dealt with imposters within the church (2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Timothy 2:16-18) as did the apostle John (1 John 4:1; 2 John 7). Yet, we know

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<sup>61</sup> The parallels in Mark 13:9-13 & Luke 21:12-19 seem to have been spoken during the discourse and Matthew adds these sayings that were left out. Strangely, Matthew inserts them into Matthew 10:17-22.

<sup>62</sup> There are many references to the persecution of Christians in the book of Acts (i.e. 4:3, 5:18-33 ect), in Paul's epistles (2 Corinthians 11:24; 2 Thess 2:14-15, Hebrews 10:32-34) and in the Book of Revelation (2:9; 3:9)

<sup>63</sup> While we believe that these texts were fulfilled in the lifetime of the disciples, we do not exclude the fact that Christians have suffered persecution in history and continue even today to be faithful to their Lord in times of oppression.

that many claiming to be prophets and messiah came to deceive the people even from outside the Christian community. Theudas (Acts 5:36-37) and Simon (Acts 8:9-11) were among those. Simon was a prominent figure as a false messiah and was mentioned by early church historians as saying, *“I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter, I am Almighty, I am all there is of God”*. As previously mentioned, Theudas deceived many by claiming that he could part the Jordan river and many others claimed revelation. During the precursor to the siege, tensions were high, and many were claiming special revelation and power.

During His encounter with the Pharisees, The Lord Jesus summarized the law in terms of *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”* (Matthew 22:37-40). The apostle Paul would express it *For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Galatians 5:14). The idea of lawlessness is that which is against God’s law and the increase in this behaviour would drive people’s love to grow cold. They would abandon the people and the faith they had once loved. We see this happening to the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:16) and to the apostle John (1 John 2:19).

### **ENDURE TO THE END (Matthew 24:13)**

Matthew begins v.13 with the term “but” distinguishing what Christ had just stated with what is to come. In contrast to not being misled by false prophets, they are commanded to endure to the end! The question becomes, to the end of what and saved from what? The term “end” here is *Telos* which refers to the termination or final state of something. There are at least two ways of interpreting the term end in this context. It can refer to the end in the coming destruction of Jerusalem but could also be in the sense of “to the end of their lives”. DeMar seems to think it is a command to endure to the end of the Jewish age which ended climactically with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He writes:

The end of what? Jesus is answering questions about the destruction of the temple and the “end of the age”, the end of the Jewish dispensation, the Old Covenant order...this is the endo that Jesus had in mind. Great social, religious and political upheavals would come upon the Roman Empire that would engulf the first-century state of Israel. Those who would endure to the end of this conflagration would be saved; that is, they would not die in Rome’s war with the Jewish rebels<sup>64</sup>

The other interpretation of this text could be that it is speaking of those followers of Christ who would remain faithful and persevere when delivered into tribulation even to the point of martyrdom. Keeping in mind that these events from 9-12 took place within a generation from the discourse. There is a parallel with Matthew 10:16-23 where the Lord exhorts them to persevere to the end when they are hated, handed over to the officials to be scourged. The lawlessness and the cold love of others should not hinder them from bringing the message of the word to the world. They would need to be willing to

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<sup>64</sup> Last Days Madness, Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1999, Gary Demar, Page 86

give their lives and endure the incredible circumstances of their day, a perseverance would result in their salvation. This is not to say that this is how they are saved, but that their salvation would be demonstrated in their willingness to persevere to the end.

### **THE GOSPEL SHALL BE PREACHED TO THE WHOLE WORLD (Matthew 24:14)**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the central message of the faith and the message that needs to be believed for sinners to be justified before a holy God and in return to be saved. While this message is in of itself good news, there is another communication of good news within the text of v.14, that this gospel will be preached throughout the whole world. The gospel of the Kingdom is not limited to the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6) but will be heralded to the whole cosmos (Matthew 28:18-19). The gospel brought through the endurance of hostility and suffering will be a testimony to all the nations (Matthew 10:18). The proclamation of the gospel to the whole world will be a sign of the end and that end will not come until it has been accomplished. This is not to say that the evangelism of the world will bring back Jesus but that we can confidently look to the gospel of God being apparent all over the earth. *In particular, this passage does not speak of worldwide evangelization as the cause of the “end”, but as a necessary preliminary*<sup>65</sup>

It's important to note that the term “world” in this passage is not *cosmos* but *oikoumene* which signifies “the inhabited earth”. France writes:

The “world” here is *he oikoumene*, the “inhabited world”, the world of people, which at the time meant primarily the area surrounding the Mediterranean and the lesser known areas to the east, around which stretched mysterious regions (comprising much of our “old world”) beyond the fringes of civilization. More narrowly it was sometimes used for the area covered by the Roman Empire (as in Luke 2:1)<sup>66</sup>.

We tend to read the scriptures as 21<sup>st</sup> century men and place ourselves in its pages as personal communication to our person but the proper way of doing exegesis is to understand what a term meant to the original readers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The *world* would not have meant the whole land mass of the earth but to those who were a part of the Greek or Roman world. The gospel would go forth into all the inhabited Roman and Greek world as a testimony to the nations and the gathering of God’s elect. The scriptures tell us that *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith* (Romans 16:25-26) and that *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing* (Colossians 1:6) and that believers be *not moved away from the hope of the gospel that*

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<sup>65</sup> France P. 909

<sup>66</sup> IBID

*you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven (Colossians 1:23)*<sup>67</sup>. The testimony of this gospel would have as its goal reaching the Gentiles! The gospel of the Kingdom was proclaimed (and continues to be proclaimed) throughout all the inhabited earth by roughly A.D. 50 and in return prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The end spoken of here is once again *telos* which, in essence, contextually refers to the end prior to the destruction of the temple.

I want to stress that this interpretation doesn't negate the responsibility we have today to preach the gospel to the whole world and to bring in the nations, it is simply to show that the Lord Jesus had the destruction of the temple in mind when He uttered these words and that these exigences were completed prior to the destruction of the great city.

## THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (Matthew 24:15)

These following texts are important to examine with their parallels found in Mark and Luke's accounts. Note the three texts and how they are expressed:

Therefore, when you see **the abomination of desolation** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (Matthew 24:15)

“But when you see **the abomination of desolation** standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (Mark 13:14)

“But when you see **Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near**. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; (Luke 21:20-21)

In Matthew's rendition of the discourse, the Lord Jesus begins the verse with the word “*oun*” (therefore) which ties the preceding “end will come” with the following words. While vs. 4-14 describe the conditions moving towards the end, vs. 15-28 describe what will it look like right before the end, and He grants His listeners instructions on what to do when they see these things!

The most obvious sign that the end has arrived was that they would see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel. Daniel describes this abomination as a desecration of the worship in the temple with the intent to stop the regular sacrifices (Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). In Daniel, the reference is to the king of the north and was looking to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes who set up a pagan altar in the temple and slaughtered a pig. He also set up statues of Zeus within the temple walls to transform the temple of God into a pagan temple. Josephus describes it in this way:

And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own God, and to adore those

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<sup>67</sup> Also see Romans 1:8; 10:18

whom he took to be gods; and made them build temples, and raise idol altars in every city and village, and offer swine upon them every day<sup>68</sup>.

The book of the Maccabees describes it as:

On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five, the king erected the desolating abomination upon the altar of burnt offerings, and in the surrounding cities of Judah they built pagan altars. They also burned incense at the doors of houses and in the streets. (1 Maccabees 1:54-55)<sup>69</sup>

The precursor of these Danielic passages were completed in the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes and now the Lord Jesus states that the fulfillment is an event coming in their lifetime. To a well-versed Jewish person living in those days, the abomination of desolation would have been linked with the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes and the desecration of the temple by a foreign army. The Lord speaks of the location of this abomination as “standing in the holy place”. The holy place is probably speaking of the temple but shouldn’t be limited as such (see below). It was the topic of discussion since the beginning of Matthew 21.

In his book, “Last Days Madness”, Gary Demar argues that the abomination of desolation was a worship meant to be offered in a false manner or profaning the right worship. He sees the abomination of desolation better described as abomination that brings desolation. He puts forth 4 potential candidates for the abomination that would bring this desolation upon the temple and the city.

The first candidate being the Zealots who were nationalist defenders of Israel and who’s revolt in 66 A.D. caused the Romans to invade and destroy the city to quench their uprising. Not only did they provoke this retaliation but also *saw their chance for nationalistic and religious revival by storming the temple*<sup>70</sup>. These Zealots had taken command of the temple area and committed serious acts of violence against the temple and even killing some of its officers. Demar writes:

At the outbreak of the Jewish war, the Zealots moved in and occupied the temple area. They allowed person who had committed crimes to roam freely in the Holy of Holies, and they perpetrated murder within the temple itself. These acts of sacrilege climaxed in the winter of 67-68 with the farcical investiture of the clown Phanni as high priest.<sup>71</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> potential candidate was the Idumeans who were invited to the revolt by the Zealots. When they entered the city, they killed many Jews and were responsible for the murder of the chief priest, Ananus. This one being the least likely.

Another potential contender for the title *Abomination* is the Religious Leaders. Demar believes these fits best since he argues that it would need to be a religious leader to defile the temple and the worship. He

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<sup>68</sup> Flavius Josephus, Antiquities, 12:253

<sup>69</sup> See also 1 Maccabees 4:36-59; 6:7; 2 Maccabees 10:1-8

<sup>70</sup> Last Days Madness, Gary Demar, P. 104

<sup>71</sup> IBID

cites Ezekiel 5:11 - *So as I live,' declares the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare.*

I would be inclined to identify the abomination that brings desolation as the Roman armies. Based upon the expression in Daniel and its fulfillment by Epiphanes Antiochus, they would have been looking for an emperor with his armies ravaging the city and setting up idols and false worship in the temple. They would have connected the Abomination of Desolation with this historical event. The armies of Titus surrounded Jerusalem and then victoriously won the city from its Jewish defenders. They burned the great city down and while it was in chaos and flames, we know that some Roman soldiers brought idols into the sanctuary and offered a sacrifice to their god in the temple. Josephus describes it in this way:

And now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator with the greatest acclamations of joy<sup>72</sup>.

This fits with Luke's rendition *that when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near* (Luke 21:20). The terms "Abomination of Desolation" and "the armies that bring her desolation" are communicating the same thing but in a different way.

Why did Matthew use the term Abomination of Desolation whereas Luke identifies it explicitly as the activity of the invading Roman armies? The most likely explanation is that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience and wanted to link up the A.D. 70 prophecy with the prophecy of Daniel. Luke, on the other hand, was writing to Gentiles outside the borders of Judea. Thus, the terminology "Abomination of Desolation" would have been confusing and enigmatic to them, prompting Luke to graphically identify precisely what Jesus had in mind: The Abomination that brings desolation to Jerusalem and its temple in the invading army under the leadership of Titus. We must remember that Jesus is answering the question of the disciples concerning "these things", "this temple", "the stones that you see", all of which would occur in the lifetime of "this generation" (V.34).<sup>73</sup>

R.T. France does provide a challenge for all these different views.

None of these views quite fit what this verse says... the Roman presence in the sanctuary too late to provide a signal for escape before the end came, while the Zealot occupation, which took place at the right time, was perhaps not quite the type of pagan defilement envisaged by Daniel.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Flavius Josephus, Jewish Wars, 6.316

<sup>73</sup> Kingdom Come: An Amillennial Alternative, Mentor, Sam Storms, 2015, P. 247

<sup>74</sup> France P. 913

One possible solution to this challenge is to not see the term “holy place” referring to the temple but referring to the holy city. A possible parallel to this text is from Daniel 9:26 where we read that *after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.* As we can see from this text, the desolation is linked, not only to the destruction of the sanctuary (temple) but also to the city.

Not everyone agrees with this understanding of the text. One popular interpretation is that this is speaking of a rebuilt temple which is yet to be erected and that the antichrist will one day sit in this temple as God. It is said that Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20 are describing two different events. The former being a future rebuilt temple while the latter is speaking of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. I struggle to see where this is speaking of two different occasions. The two texts have too many parallels to be communicating something different.

	<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
Not one stone unturned	24:2	21:5
The Questions	24:3	21:6-7
False Christs	24:4-5	21:8
Nation rises against Nation	24:7	21:10
Earthquakes	24:7	21:11
Famines	24:7	21:11
Deliver you	24:9	21:12
Jerusalem’s Desolation	24:15	21:20
Those in Judea Flee to the Mountains	24:16	21:20
Pregnant & Nursing	24:18	21:23

1. Both writers introduce the discourse with the same questions from the disciples
2. Both writers use similar signs to describe events prior to the “end” such as wars, earthquakes and false Messiahs misleading
3. Both warn to flee the area when they see the desolation

The term “standing” which in Mark’s rendition is a masculine participle seems to point to a man. The text is then paralleled with 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10 where “the man of lawlessness” takes his place in the temple to be worshiped. The problem with this interpretation is that Matthew renders “standing” in the neuter which *denotes an object or occurrence rather than a person*<sup>75</sup>. The abomination of desolation is not described by Matthew as a man but in the neuter which Luke then describes as the armies surrounding Jerusalem. Perhaps Mark’s rendition would be better considered not as a single man but as men such as those in a collective army.

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<sup>75</sup> France P. 912

## **FLEE FROM THE TRIBULATION (Matthew 24:16-22)**

Beginning in v. 16, there is a switch in the address from the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun “you” to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person “those who are in Judea”. Some commentators have identified this switch in pronouns as the Lord moving away from limiting His audience to the disciples but to adding all in Judea<sup>76</sup>. However, it could very well also be communicating that while not all would be there to witness this (James was martyred prior to these events) that those who were alive and, in the region, should heed His words. The words of the Lord were uttered with incredible urgency commanding them to flee to the mountains and away from the city and armies. They were not to go inside if they were on the rooftop. *The urgency of the flight is underlined by the vivid images of the person who hears the news while resting on the roof of the house and dare not go inside (the roof was reached by an outside staircase) to pack a travel bag, and the field worker who outer garment, removed for work, must be left behind*<sup>77</sup>. There was no time to prepare, and their exodus needed to be with haste. Their destination was to the mountains (hills) which was a traditional place of refuge to escape danger (Genesis 14:10; Ezekiel 7:16).

While the previous verses communicated the urgency by which they need to flee, vs. 19-20 expresses the difficulty of this journey. The expression “woe” is not meant to convey condemnation but pity or sympathy on those to whom these things would fall. The journey would be hard for the average person and for a pregnant woman or those who are nursing, it would be exceedingly difficult especially when considering the path and the terrain of the destination. The winter months could make things even worst for those who were to make this trip during those months. *Bad weather will only make it worse: it can be very cold in the Judean hills in winter, and heavy rain and flooding can make travelling conditions difficult or even impossible.*<sup>78</sup> The challenge of travelling on the Sabbath, while peculiar, was in all-likelihood speaking of both the trials of travelling when neither food, provisions or shelter would be available. Their journey would also potential infringe upon the Pharisees’ law which limited travel to no more than ¾ of a mile on the sabbath day. An important mention to note is that the conditions in which the Lord is referring to are all based upon 1<sup>st</sup> century life. Being on the housetop<sup>79</sup> or difficulties with travelling during a sabbath were issues related to those living in that generation.

It should be noted that the command to flee the city, in contrast to staying and fighting alongside the Jewish revolt, was followed by believers. A church leader named Simon (Symeon)<sup>80</sup> lead Christian believers out of Jerusalem to a mountainous area called “Pella” in Perea. Christian historian, Eusebius, records the actions of believers under Simon:

The people of the Church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ traveled from Jerusalem, so

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<sup>76</sup> France P 914

<sup>77</sup> IBID P. 914

<sup>78</sup> France P. 914

<sup>79</sup> Demar P. 111

<sup>80</sup> Simon was the successor of James, the brother of the Lord Jesus and many believe His cousin

that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea...<sup>81</sup>"

One might wonder how on earth did the believers get out of Jerusalem if the Romans had surrounded the city? Cestius Callus, who was a Roman governor of the region, marched from Syria with twenty thousand soldiers to Jerusalem to quash an uproar for the killing of 3600 citizens. The journey began in A.D. 66 when without any warning nor any reason, Cestius ordered his troops to withdraw providing ample opportunity to flee. *As an eyewitness to the events, Josephus writes, "without any just occasion in the world". The Jews saw the withdrawal as a sign of weakness and pursued the retreating army, which gave the Jewish Christians the opportunity to escape unhindered*<sup>82</sup>.

## **THE GREAT TRIBULATION – WHAT HAPPENED IN JERUSALEM IN A.D. 70 (Matthew 24:21/ Mark 13: 19/ Luke 21:23-24)**

Now, let's move to one of the most hotly debated expressions of this entire discourse, the Great Tribulation. Many have spent an enormous amount of ink and thought into where the rapture fits with this Great Tribulation. I've been asked on numerous occasions whether I'm pre-mid or post-tribulation. My answer is none of these although I must admit that I believe that the coming of the Lord will be long after the tribulation described in this passage. My persuasion is that the actual fulfillment of this tribulation happened in A.D. 70. The description of this time of misery is has been challenging to many. One of the disputes that people have with accepting these texts as fulfilled in A.D. 70 are the words *"such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be"*. Surely there were events more dreadful in our history than the destruction of this city? When we consider the horrors of the Holocaust and Stalin's actions in Russia, these must pale in comparison to the death and suffering inflicted in these countries? These same interpreters visualize this great tribulation prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ when things will be far worst than the events of Jerusalem's demise. While we shouldn't minimize the tragedy of so many lives lost in the Holocaust nor in dreadful events that surely will come in our future, we must consider just how horrible the siege of Jerusalem was and the impact it had. We need to ask ourselves how an individual of Jewish descent in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judea would interpret these events?

It's important to begin by examining that the term "great tribulation" used in Matthew, while similar with Mark, is defined differently with Luke. Luke likens the great tribulation with *there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* (Luke 21:23b-24). Luke's definition of the Great Tribulation can be summed up in those words. Notice that the distress doesn't fall upon the whole earth but the "land". This land is identified as "Jerusalem" where the Gentiles, in the form of the Romans, and many will be killed and taken into other lands. All these things happened explicitly in the siege. The expression Great Tribulation

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<sup>81</sup> Eusebius, Church History, 3,5,3

<sup>82</sup> Demar P. 111

is also used in Daniel 12:1 and probably what the Lord Jesus was referencing during the discourse<sup>83</sup>. Let's take a moment to consider what really happened in Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Once the troops of Cestius arrived, they could not quench the rebellion and seize the city. Nero called in his great general Vespasian to put an end to the Jewish rebellion. Jerusalem stood as the last beacon of defense for the country, but the encompassing armies didn't produce the unity amongst the Jews within the city walls that it needed to fight the Romans. To the contrary, chaos broke out in the city. Within its walls, law & order ceased with many divisions fighting each other rather than the Romans. The Zealots killed many within its walls prior to the Romans setting foot within the city. Josephus describes the actions of the Zealots:

They agreed in nothing but this, to kill those that were innocent. The noise also of those that were fighting was incessant, both by day and by night; but the lamentations of those that mourned exceeded the other; nor was there ever any occasion for them to leave off their lamentations, because their calamities came perpetually one upon another, although the deep consternation they were in prevented their outward wailing; but being constrained by their fear to conceal their inward passions, they were inwardly tormented, without daring to open their lips in groans. Nor was any regard paid to those that were still alive, by their relations; nor was there any care taken of burial for those that were dead; the occasion of both which was this, that everyone despaired of himself; for those that were not among the seditious had no great desires of anything, as expecting for certain that they should very soon be destroyed; but for the seditious themselves, they fought against each other, while they trod upon the dead bodies as they lay heaped one upon another, and taking up a mad rage from those dead bodies that were under their feet, became the fiercer thereupon. They, moreover, were still inventing somewhat or other that was pernicious against themselves; and when they had resolved upon anything, they executed it without mercy, and omitted no method of torment or of barbarity<sup>84</sup>.

While the infighting was ensuing within its walls, famine soon struck those within the city. There was no way for food to enter Jerusalem and madmen within burned the little food they had. Again, Josephus recalls:

But as for the richer sort, it proved all one to them whether they staid in the city, or attempted to get out of it; for they were equally destroyed in both cases; for every such person was put to death under this pretense, that they were going to desert,—but in reality that the robbers might get what they had. The madness of the seditious did also increase together with their famine, and both those miseries were every day inflamed more and more; for there was no corn which anywhere appeared publicly, but the robbers came running into, and searched men's private houses; and then, if they found any, they tormented them, because they had denied they had any; and if they found none, they tormented them worse, because they supposed they had more carefully concealed it. The indication they made use of whether they had any or not was taken from the bodies of these miserable wretches; which, if they were in good case, they

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<sup>83</sup> Other parallels in Joel 2:2 & Revelation 16:18

<sup>84</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.31-35

supposed they were in no want at all of food; but if they were wasted away, they walked off without searching any further; nor did they think it proper to kill such as these, because they saw they would very soon die of themselves for want of food. It was now a miserable case, and a sight that would justly bring tears into our eyes, how men stood as to their food, while the more powerful had more than enough, and the weaker were lamenting (for want of it). But the famine was too hard for all other passions, and it is destructive to nothing so much as to modesty; for what was otherwise worthy of reverence was in this case despised; insomuch that children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their very mouths, and what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants; and when those that were most dear were perishing under their hands, they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives.<sup>85</sup>

The means by which to obtain food was nearly impossible and many resorted to eating animal excrement, hay and even clothing to ease their hunger. Children were being sold for food and those suspected of hiding food were tortured beyond comprehension. The suffering was so great that Josephus could say that *Neither did any other city suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that this was, from the beginning of the world*<sup>86</sup>. To make matters worst, if one decided to leave the city, they were captured by Titus and the Romans and crucified in plain sight to intimidate those within its walls. *The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment*<sup>87</sup> So many were crucified during the siege that “room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies”<sup>88</sup>. This didn’t deter the Zealots and Josephus even pleaded with them to surrender while at the city walls to avoid more suffering.

After Nero’s death, Vespasian left for Rome to calm a rebellion and eventually became the emperor. His son Titus took command of the armies. The armies of Rome surrounded the city which deepened the inability to find food. Josephus, once again, describes this event:

So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead, wheresoever their misery seized them. thus did the miseries of Jerusalem grow worse and worse every day, and the seditious were still more irritated by the calamities they were under, even while the famine preyed upon themselves, after it had preyed upon the people. And indeed the multitude of carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench, which was a hinderance to those that would make sallies out of

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<sup>85</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.424-425; 428-430

<sup>86</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.442

<sup>87</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.450

<sup>88</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.451

the city, and fight the enemy: but as those were to go in battle-array, who had been already used to ten thousand murders, and must tread upon those dead bodies as they marched along<sup>89</sup>

The famine was so bad that at one point, a mother killed her own son and cooked him to ease her hunger. When those who smelled the aroma came to see, to their horror, she offered him to them.

Eventually, Titus was able to breach the walls of the city and the temple was set on fire. *While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner; so that this war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives, as those that defended themselves by fighting*<sup>90</sup>. When the Romans entered the city, they continued to kill without mercy. The sight within the city of dead bodies caused the soldiers to stand in horror at what they saw.

According to Josephus, approximately 1.1 million people died during that siege. Many of the survivors were sold into slavery and the city as well as the temple were flattened to the ground to the extent that Josephus could say *for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited*<sup>91</sup>. Not one stone was left upon the other that was not torn down.

The expression *such as has no occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will* is probably a hyperbole to describe a horrible judgment and devastation upon a people. The OT uses it in this way in the great cry in the land of Egypt (Exodus 11:6), the hail and locusts devastating its land (Exodus 9:18, 10:14) and of the Jewish captivity by the Babylonians (Ezekiel 5:9)<sup>92</sup>. Daniel utilizes this expression also to describe the calamity against his rulers and a time of trouble to come (Daniel 9:12; 12:1). The Lord Jesus employs this language to communicate a great devastation upon the temple, the city, and its people. To a Jewish citizen, the devastation of the great city, the destruction of the temple and its ordinances and the killing of a million with hundreds of thousands lead away into captivity would certainly have been thought of as a great tribulation. This also would have explicitly fulfilled Luke's expression of the Lord's words *"they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles"* (Luke 21:24). The disciples would have understood the context being the city and its temple. It is important to notice that the statement *"nor will ever be again"* seems to point to something to happen the future rather than at the end of history! If there is still a time *"to be"* then it cannot refer to the end of human history. *If the supposed future tribulation is followed immediately by the millennium or the eternal state, it would be pointless to*

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<sup>89</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.512-513; 6.1-2

<sup>90</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 6.271

<sup>91</sup> Josephus, Jewish Wars, 7.3

<sup>92</sup> Also see Joel 1:1-4; 2:2

say that a tribulation of such magnitude will ever take place again, for there would be no remaining time to prove the assertion<sup>93</sup>.

The survivors are referred to as the elect or chosen people. These are God's people whom God intervenes to save them by cutting short the days. They are those who God will not allow to be deceived by the false Christ and false prophets (v.24) and those gathered from the four corners of the land (v.31).

## **FALSE MESSIAH'S & FALSE PROPHETS (Matthew 24:23-28)**

As we noted earlier, there were many "false Messiah's" and "false prophets" in the days just preceding the fall of the great city. The warning from the Lord was that any who claimed to hold the title of Messiah or prophet in those days should be ignored. Whether they are outside the city in the wilderness or within its walls in an upper room, the warning was clear: Do not believe them.

The words "*For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect*" have lead many to believe that these are miracle workers such as Jannes and Jambres in Moses' day who would show signs and wonders as a proof of the authenticity of their claims. The argument is that this couldn't be speaking of a time prior to A.D. 70 since none of these phenomena happened. On the contrary, there were many who offered "miraculous proofs" to substantiate their claim as chosen.

The reason why the disciples shouldn't believe them is because the coming of the Son of Man would be like lightning coming from east to west. This expression is challenging since it could be interpreted in two different ways:

1. In the same way that one couldn't help but notice lightning flashing from east to west, His coming would not be confusing nor recognized by all those under it. France argues that *this is a sort of "aside" which draws a sharp distinction between the events during the siege and the still future Parousia.*<sup>94</sup> The Parousia couldn't be missed and would leave to doubt as was the miracles and signs of a false Messiah or prophet. In other words, the view argues that the text speaks of the second coming of Christ at the end of history. *He is thus setting the Parousia and the end of the age decisively apart from the coming destruction of the temple. The one may be seen coming and prepared... but the other will carry no warning.*<sup>95</sup>
2. The other interpretation sees this text as referring to the judgment to come upon the city. Lightning was a symbol in the OT of the visitation of Yahweh in judgment against people<sup>96</sup>. While it is said that God came in judgment upon them, we know that there was no physical coming involved. We read of "*The Lord came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them* (Deuteronomy 33:2). *When the temple was ransacked by*

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<sup>93</sup> Storms P. 254

<sup>94</sup> France P. 918

<sup>95</sup> France P.918

<sup>96</sup> Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Job 36:30; Ezekiel 21:15, 28; Zechariah 9:14

*Nebuchadnezzar, we read that “the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God” (Daniel 1:2). Nebuchadnezzar “besieged” Jerusalem, but God orchestrated the entire affair<sup>97</sup> (See Isaiah 42:24-25). In other words, the argument is that God used Rome, much like the Assyrians (Isaiah 10:5-6) to judge the nation. These words are symbolic of how the Son of Man will come to judge Israel through Titus and the Roman army.*

The aside theory is strong due to the linguistic assumptions behind the term “parousia”. In Luke’s parallel, it seems to associate the flashes with the idea that there will be no sign prior to the coming of the Son.

The Lord then makes a remark that at first glance seems completely out of context with His previous message. The vultures are attracted to animals that are about to die but also, they steer towards carcasses of animals that have already perished. This saying alluded to Job’s where the slain are, there he is [the vulture]. (Job 39:30). Much like the vulture can identify its prey, the disciples were to practice the same keen eye to identify the coming of their Messiah.

### **THE SUN, MOON & STARS (Matthew 24:29/ Mark 13:24/ Luke 21:25)**

The key texts on the debate of the interpretation of this entire chapter fall upon vs. 29-31. This is where the line is drawn on whether one will interpret the chapter as still looking to be fulfilled in our future or whether it was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. There are still others who would subscribe to the idea that though the previous texts speak of Jerusalem’s fall, the following verses as an interlude or an aside to speak about the Parousia at the end of time. One of the challenges with interpreting these words is that we need to take a step back and understand why the Lord used these specific expressions. We need to find this language in other texts of scripture especially in the OT to identify and decipher their meaning. *Jesus was speaking to a people saturated by Old Testament language, concepts, and imagery. From the earliest days of their lives they memorized and were taught the Old Testament. Thus, when Jesus spoke to them of things to come he used the prophetic vocabulary of the Old Testament which they would instantly recognize<sup>98</sup>. The Lord Jesus wasn’t using new language to communicate with the disciples, the terminology was familiar for anyone who was taught the prophets of old. France observes:*

Most of the wording in vv.29-31 is made up of OT allusions... The problem is that modern Christian readers are generally not very comfortable at home in the OT prophetic imagery and are instead heirs to a long tradition of Christian exegesis which takes it for granted that such cosmic language and in particular imagery of Dan 7:13-14 can only be understood of the Parousia and the end of the world<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> Demar P. 124-125

<sup>98</sup> Storms P. 263

<sup>99</sup> France P. 920

Let's begin by observing that in v.29, the Lord states that the following verses (29-31) will happen "immediately after" the tribulation of those days. There is no room for a gap or delay between this tribulation and the events that happen after<sup>100</sup>. What is meant by the term "tribulation in those days"? Some have argued that this tribulation is different than the tribulation in v. 21. They point out that the tribulation in the earlier text is speaking of the events during the fall of Jerusalem while the tribulation of "those days" is referring to a different and potentially much longer period<sup>101</sup>. The problem with this interpretation is that the terminology describing the timing (immediately after) doesn't naturally carry a break from what was previously communicated.

We must also consider that the timing is closely linked with the events that are described in the following texts. The Lord states that in those days *"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of the earth will be shaken"*. For many, walking outside by day or by night, this is a clear indication that these texts are yet to be fulfilled and in return must be speaking of a future event. How can it be any clearer that this is not something that happened in the past? When interpreting a text such as these, we must look to the OT to examine whether this style of language was used in the past and what it meant to someone living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The usage of this expression is found in Genesis 37 to symbolize *people* especially a family hierarchy. Joseph is given a dream and reveals it to his family. *"Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."* (Genesis 37:9) Joseph, being one of the youngest brothers, would have been in subjection to all those older than him, especially his father and mother. Notice how Jacob interprets the dream *"What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"* (Genesis 37:10). The sun, moon and stars are clearly symbolic and not referring to a literal bowing down of these entities. While this text is not a direct parallel to our text in Matthew 24:29, it at least proves that these celestial entities are taken in other texts in a symbolic way.

For our immediate context, it's important to review the terms "sun, moon and stars" as a coming to a cataclysmic end. There are several passages that utilize this exact language. Let's examine a few of these passages:

### Isaiah 13:9-10 / 13

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, **To make the land a desolation**; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For **the stars of heaven** and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And **the moon** will not shed its light...Therefore I will make the **heavens tremble**, And **the earth will be shaken** from its place At the fury of the Lord of hosts In the day of His burning anger. (Isaiah 13:9-10,13)

Isaiah 13 begins an extensive review of the great empire of Babylon that takes us all the way through 14:27. The prophecy begins with an oracle concerning the Empire or nation of Babylon (V.1). The Babylonians were come to eventually conquer many nations including Israel. But these scriptures reveal

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<sup>100</sup> Notice the usage of the term in Matthew in 3:16; 4:20, 22; 8:3; 13:5, 20; 14:22; 20:34; 21:12; 26:74)

<sup>101</sup> See Carson P. 495

that the Lord would not allow the Babylonians to reign forever. He would show His might by raising an army (V.4d) that are coming from a far country (V.5a) which would be used as an instrument of indignation against the Babylonians (V.5b). Later in the chapter, Isaiah prophecies that the Lord will stir up the Medes against them (V.17) and Babylon would receive a fate worst than Sodom & Gomorrah (V.19). It will bring about a time when the land of Babylon will be filled with nothing but desolation (Vs. 20-22).

Our text is located in the middle of these two proclamations. There is no break between the texts and as good exegetes, we must place vs.6-16 as a part of the overall argument from Isaiah. He begins in v.6 with a command to “wail” since the Day of the Lord is near (V.6) and this day of the Lord would come to make the land desolate (V.9). This is speaking of the conquering of the Babylonians which God associates with His judgment upon their people. The stars, moon and heavens & earth trembling, is symbolic to demonstrate the destruction of land and the upheaval of Babylon’s political rule. This chapter then isn’t speaking of some future destruction of the world, but the judgment upon a particular nation. The fall of Babylon happened through Cyrus the Medes in October of 539 B.C. when he defeated his armies and trampled the land.

### **Ezekiel 32:7-8**

And when I extinguish you, **I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud. And the moon will not give its light.** “All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you And will set darkness on your land,” Declares the Lord God. (Ezekiel 32:7-8)

The beginning of the discourse in Ezekiel gives us the nature of the context in that the Lord commands Ezekiel to take up a lamentation over Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. (V.2). He begins by laying a charge against him due to the arrogance of the Pharaoh (V.2b) and how he caused havoc (v.2d). The Lord declares a judgment upon him, that *a company of many peoples will life him up in God’s net* (v.3), like a fish out of water, he will be left vulnerable, and the pharaoh will be destroyed (Vs.4-5). Similar to the times of the Exodus of the Hebrews, Pharaoh’s land will also suffer the judgment of the Lord (V.6; 13-15). When Pharaoh is finally destroyed (V.7), it will be an upheaval of the political rule and the destruction of the land. (Vs. 7-8). God will use the King of Babylon to execute this judgment (V.11). In 605 B.C., the Neo-Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish which led to their being left under the rule of the Neo-Babylonian king.

### **Amos 8:9**

“It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord God, **“That I will make the sun go down at noon. And make the earth dark in broad daylight.** (Amos 8:9)

The prophecy of Amos begins with the vision of a basket of summer fruit (V.1), and the Lord said that *“the end has come for my people Israel, I will spare them no longer”* (V.2). So, from the beginning, we

are given the context and recipients of a judgment, which in this case, is Israel. He speaks of the judgment upon the nation because of their trampling of the needy and doing away with the humble of the land (V.4). The judgment coming from God will include the land. The land will be tossed like the Nile (V.8). It is in this context of judgment upon Israel is described as *the sun must go down at noon and the earth dark in broad daylight* (V.9). It is, once again, a judgment against the land and in return (Vs.11) a time when they will not be able to find the Lord (V.12). Amos was written around the time of Isaiah but predicted in these texts the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

### Joel 2:10 / 30-31

Before them **the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness...** “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. “The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. (Joel 2:10, 30-31)

The first chapter of Joel ends with the declaration of a famine (vs.16-20) which is probably caused by the Locust of the initial texts (V4). This famine is upon the land, and this judgment is called the “The Day of the Lord” (V.15). Joel calls upon Israel to fast, gather in an assembly to the House of the Lord and cry out (repent) to the Lord (V14). By the time we get to the texts in Joel chapter 2, much like our other scriptural segments, it begins with the identity of the subject. In this case, we are told that *Zion... My holy mountain* was to sound the alarm to create the signal that all the inhabitants of the land should tremble (V.1). This is obviously a reference to Israel and especially Jerusalem. The reason for this trumpet blow is that *the Day of the Lord* was coming. Notice the language of v2, that the darkness and gloom speak of a great and mighty people, probably referring to an army (V.2). These people are further identified in vs.4-9 with characteristics of a military campaign. Joel then identifies this “darkness” as *“There has never been anything like it, now will there be again after it, to the years of many generations* (V.2). He then speaks in V.3 about the land being “desolate”. In this context, Joel brings in *the heavens trembling, the sun and moon growing dark and the stars losing their light* (v.10). But notice that in v.11, he continues with the theme of the desolation caused by the army and the Day of the Lord being great and awesome! Joel’s prophecy then turns to the call on Israel to repent from their wicked ways (Vs.12-17), which will ensue the response of the Lord to have pity on them, and prosperity will once again bless His people (Vs.18-27).

A fascinating point to notice in the context of this blessing are the words of vs. 28-32. These are the texts describing the blessing of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon “all flesh” (V.28), and their sons & daughters will prophecy, old and young men will have visions and both male and female will have the Spirit of God poured out upon them. This is the time when God will display His blessings but also His judgment, which he once again describes as the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into

blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes (V.31). Notice that these verses of judgment are in between the giving of the Spirit and the time when all who call upon the name of the Lord will be delivered or saved (V.32).

These texts are quoted in their full extent by Peter in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21) where he preaches to a group of Jews that the words of Joel were being fulfilled in their day. These were all in the context of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22-24) and in His being crowned as King (Acts 2: 29-36). Notice that Peter's words are a little different than Joel's in that he refers to it as "the last days", instead of "afterwards" (future) probably borrowing from Isaiah 2:2, Hosea 3:5 or even Micah 4:1. Peter believed that he was living in the last days, the days that the prophet Joel described. The outpouring of the Spirit of God happened on the Day of Pentecost, and we know that the call to believe on the Lord for salvation was uttered throughout scripture, especially in Romans 10:13. So, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord and the signs and wonders fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:22) and the apostles (Acts 4:20; 5:12 ect...), how does the sun, moon and stars relate to this passage? Notice that the only other place that this passage is quoted in the whole NT is in Matthew 24 & Luke 21, both in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem.

### Joel 3:15-16

**The sun and moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness.** The Lord roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem, **And the heavens and the earth tremble.** But the Lord is a refuge for His people And a stronghold to the sons of Israel. (Joel 3:15-16)

This segment in the book of Joel is referring to a judgment upon the nations for their treatment of Israel and Judah (V.2). It will be a time of restoration for Judah and Jerusalem (V.1). This was a time when Israel was scattered among the nations (V.2c). Notice however that the specific nations facing God's judgment are named, it was Tyre, Sidon and the regions of Philistia that would be recompensed for their actions (V.4). These nations had sold the Israelites into slavery, and God would make sure the same would be done to them (V.8). The judgment spoken of is upon the nations who are taken to the valley of Jehoshaphat, which Joel describes as the "surrounding nations" (V.11-12). This is not a worldwide judgment upon every nation of the earth, but a very local judgment upon those specific nations. We are told that the day of the Lord is near (V.14) and that in this judgment, the sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness... and the heavens and earth tremble. (Vs.15-16).

The above verses were predicting long before Jesus' prophetic words that these stellar bodies would cease. These verses clearly deal primarily with the threat of judgment against nations both Israel and others. What we should notice in these passages is that the context is generally narrowed down to a specific nation whether Egypt, Babylon, nations surrounding Israel or Israel itself, all within history. *Language about cosmic collapse, then, is used by the OT prophets to symbolize God's act of judgment within history, with the emphasis on catastrophic political reversals*<sup>102</sup>. This celestial turmoil

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<sup>102</sup> France P. 922

communicates a change to an earthly kingdom generally associated with a political or spiritual change. While Egypt, Babylon or Edom were destroyed, the sun, moon and stars are currently still in place! The judgment of God, generally through the means of another nation, would come against them to overtake their leaders and turn everything upside down. *The destruction of earthly kingdoms is portrayed in terms of a heavenly shaking*<sup>103</sup>. It isn't then a far stretch to conclude that v.29 speaks contextually of the judgment of God falling on the city and the Jewish nation in total. It describes the religious leaders and the people being overtaken by the Romans and the complete end of their political and religious structures<sup>104</sup>. The above texts in Amos and Joel are speaking explicitly of this political and religious restructuring against Israel. Using this OT prophetic language communicated to the disciples that they would experience this complete overturn and destruction of those toward whom it was proclaimed, in this instance, the city and the temple.

### **THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN (Matthew 24:30-31)**

Much like a literal sense is automatically granted to v.29 by average students of eschatology, the same approach is used of v.30-31. It's claimed that the texts communicate a literal appearing of a sign or of the Lord Himself in the sky. Some in the past even believed that the sign would be the appearing of a cross over the earth (Constantine)! I believe that the better approach is to consult, once again, the OT to see how these expressions are defined. If it is the case that the sun, moon and stars can be interpreted symbolically, and associated with the destruction of Jerusalem, then it's not a far stretch to at least consider vs. 30-31 in a similar fashion. The following verses are entrenched in OT prophetic language, and it would serve us well to consider the vocabulary of these prophets once again.

The Lord speaks of a "sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky" that will communicate to the tribes that He has come. Notice what it doesn't say, it doesn't say that the tribes will see the Son of Man but that they will see "the sign" of His coming in the sky (heavens). While the translation can allow that the sign will appear in heaven, it can also communicate that they shall see the sign that would prove that the Son of Man is in heaven. This is really no different than in Acts 2:33 with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter states that those at Pentecost could "see and hear" that the Spirit had been poured out yet they couldn't actually see the Spirit but they could see and hear the signs or repercussions of that Spirit being present. Much in the same way, they would "see" the results of that coming. But what was the sign? *Those who would witness the events of 70 would see the sign of Jesus' enthronement when they saw Jerusalem's destruction. Thus the "sign" of the Son of Man being enthroned and vindicated in "heaven" is the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple on "earth"*<sup>105</sup>. The symbolic nature of the text also should leak into our understanding of the term "to see". While it certainly can mean to fix one's

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<sup>103</sup> Storms P. 264

<sup>104</sup> The upheaval of a nation generally results in its replacement by another nation. In this instance, the Romans would have taken over the political sphere, but many commentators see something more. The promise that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them to be given to a nation who would product fruit of it (Matthew 21:43). This nation is a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (1 Peter 2:9).

<sup>105</sup> Storms P.269

physical eyes upon a person or object, in many cases in the NT, it refers to understanding or gaining insight into something<sup>106</sup> which I believe is the case in this text.

The coming of the Son of Man is a reoccurring theme in the gospel of Matthew. The seeing the Son of Man coming is found in 16:28 *Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*” And also in 26:64 when the high priest asks the Lord to acknowledge that He is the Christ to which He responded, *“You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, [hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”*. The language is undoubtedly speaking of something that was expected within a generation of the time they were spoken. *All of them speak of a “coming of the Son of Man” which is visible, which is associated with power, and which is to take place within the lifetime of those to whom he is speaking (In this case, “this generation” in v.34)*<sup>107</sup>. It is largely accepted that the passage is utilizing the language of Daniel 7:13-14.

*“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. “And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.*

Notice in Daniel’s words that the Son of Man is “coming” in the clouds of heaven to God the Father to receive His Kingship and Kingdom. There is nothing in this texts that speaks of the Son of Man coming to the earth. This is not speaking therefore of Christ’s returning to the earth as in the Parousia at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming<sup>108</sup> but it is speaking of His coming to the ancient of days for His enthronization<sup>109</sup>. We mustn’t think of the term “coming” in the sense of descending but ascending. It communicates an arrival, not to the earth but into heaven<sup>110</sup>. He is given dominion on earth and in heaven (Matthew 28:18) and the dominion will never pass way. His kingdom will never be defeated and those who are the enemies of the King and His Kingdom will receive their full judgment. He will come on the clouds with glory and with power to deal with those who were responsible for His rejection and death<sup>111</sup>. This happened at His ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. The upheaval spoken of in v.29 through the cosmic tribulation of the sun, moon, stars and the earth, which will produce an overturning of

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<sup>106</sup> See John 12:40; Acts 26:18; Luke 24:31; Mark 1:44; Luke 17:22; John 3:3; Romans 15:21.

<sup>107</sup> France P. 923

<sup>108</sup> Greek *erchomenos*

<sup>109</sup> The term Parousia is not used in vs. 29-31 but appears in v.27 and then again in vs. 37 & 39

<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that I do believe that the Lord will return visibly and to the earth at the end of history but I do not believe that this passage is communicating this truth.

<sup>111</sup> *What is the association of clouds with God? First, God showed Himself by the physical presence of clouds, although no one ever saw Him (e.g, Ex. 13:21; 14:24; 19:9; 20:21; 24:15; 33:9; 34:5; 1 Kings 8:12). Second, God’s abode is described as a canopy of clouds (Psalm 97:2). Third, God’s mode of transportation is figuratively described as a chariot (104:3). Fourth, when God speaks, “He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth” (Jer. 10:13; 51:16). Fifth, the “day of the LORD... will be a day of clouds.” (Ezek. 30:3; Joel 2:2). Sixth, God’s judgment of the wicked is described as the upheaval of the created order: “in whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet” (Nahum 1:3). In each of the above examples, clouds are symbols of God’s presence. Demar P. 160*

power, both political and religious, is shown to be replaced with another reign over Israel, mainly that of the Son of Man.

It's important to note that clouds are symbols of God's presence and in our context, He comes on a cloud in judgment. The whole context since 23:32 was the judgment upon Jerusalem for their rejection and murder of the prophets as well as their rejection and coming murder of the Son. We saw this in the form of the parables of the Two Sons, the Landowner and the Marriage Feast. In all these parables, there is a visitation from God for the rejection of the Son. This coming won't be with the clouds to receive His Kingdom and glory, but He comes on the cloud with the glory and power already received at the ascension when He sat down at the right hand of the Father. This was no different than Yahweh coming in the clouds to judge Egypt (Isaiah 19:1) as an expression of judgment rather than a physical coming. Truly, this judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a day of clouds!

The expression "*all the tribes of the earth will mourn*" is undoubtedly an allusion to Zechariah 12. The text could just as easily be translated "all the tribes of the land" speaking, not of the whole earth, but specifically of the land in Israel. The use of the word "tribe" is largely used in relating to the descendants of 12 sons of Jacob or the tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 2:36; Acts 13:21; Romans 11:1; Hebrews 7:13-14 etc.). Notice also that the text doesn't say that they will approach this coming with approval but that these tribes will "mourn". While some argue that the mourning is meant to communicate repentance, this remorse is probably more likely to convey a regret for what they had done without a turning away! The text in Zechariah demonstrates that these mourners are those who had pierced Him coming from the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:10). These were not every tribe known to the earth, but Zechariah defines those tribes as coming from the people of Israel. *In the overall pattern of Zechariah 9-14 this "one they have pierced" is usually interpreted as a rejected messianic figure, who appears also as the rejected shepherd in Zech 11:4-14 and the shepherd killed by the sword in Zech 13:7-9. In this gospel both of the latter passages will be applied to Jesus' death in Jerusalem and the present allusion should therefore probably be taken in the same way*<sup>112</sup>.

The result of His coronation is He is granted authority to send His angels to gather His chosen people. The language, much like vs 29-30 should be taken as symbolic and refer to OT prophetic texts. Many of the symbols and sayings are found in reference to OT analogies. The gathering of the elect is found in Deuteronomy where it states that *the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. 4 If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.* (30:3-4) and in Isaiah we read that *It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.* (27:13). Those who adhere to the idea that vs.29-31 should be interpreted as events at the end of history explain these texts as the gathering of Israelites scattered after a military invasion (Revelation 12:14-16). An angel will blow a mighty trumpet to call them back to the land of Israel for the

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<sup>112</sup> France P. 925

final restoration anticipated in the OT (Deuteronomy 30:1-8)<sup>113</sup>. If v.29 speaks of the change in political and religious authority and that authority is now ascribed to the Lord Jesus as King and religious leader of Israel, it would make better sense that the gathering of the elect would initiate in the 1<sup>st</sup> century as well. I believe that these prophecies were regarding the gathering of Israelites after they'd been scattered abroad however, these texts are now applied by the Lord to those NT believers, both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 8:11-12).

Interpreting the “angels” and the significance of the trumpet blast is difficult. Was Matthew referring to heavenly hosts, which is by and far the sense it’s used in other texts in Matthew<sup>114</sup>, or could it be speaking of angels as human messengers as in 11:10? France would argue from the former where *in the context of the authority of the Son of Man it probably refers to the spiritual power underlying human evangelization*<sup>115</sup>. Others however would argue that the latter fits the description of the angels. I would argue that both make sense. The term “angeli” certainly can mean celestial beings however it is also commonly used as human messengers<sup>116</sup> even in the gospels<sup>117</sup>. For the most part, theologians are at least in agreement that the great trumpet is a call to gather before God. We see this in Israel’s history when a trumpet was blown to gather the people together for worship (Numbers 10:1-10). But the trumpet call can also symbolic of Israel’s messengers calling a people to repentance. Notice the following OT reference to the messengers call to repentance being in the likeness of a trumpet blowing:

Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins. (Isaiah 58:1)

Thus says the Lord, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ “And I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not listen.’ (Jeremiah 6:16-17)

He sees the sword coming upon the land and blows on the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman’s hand.’ “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. (Ezekiel 33:3-7)

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<sup>113</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, (Wheaton IL, Victor Books, 1990, P. 255) – as quoted in Demar’s *Last Days Madness*.

<sup>114</sup> i.e. Matthew 13:41 & 16:27

<sup>115</sup> France P 928

<sup>116</sup> See 2 Chronicles 26:15-16; Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7; Hebrews 1:14; James 2:25; Revelation 1:1

<sup>117</sup> Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27, 9:52)

There are other references to trumpets coming from the clouds of heaven (Exodus 19:16), to proclaim the restoration of Israel (Isaiah 27:13) and the deliverance of Judah and Ephraim (Zechariah 9:14). While Hebrews 12:19 is more ambiguous and probably referring symbolically to Exodus 19, Revelation 8:2 and Revelation 11:15 relates the trumpet blow to announce certain truths. Many who subscribe to a future fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse, have interpreted the trumpet call as the final trumpet to be blown prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ and the resurrection of the righteous (as in such texts as 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

We must note that another interpretation that has gained popularity is that the Lord had the Jubilee in mind (Leviticus 25). The purpose of the trumpet's sound is to gather the elect from all over the world. Notice that it doesn't say *where* they are called to be gathered to. It is not a place but a person that they are gathered to. This is a reference to the great calling of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, to receive their King. When the overthrow of Jerusalem was complete, (sun, moon and stars), the political and religious life severed and the Kingdom of Jesus established on earth and in heaven, the messengers would proclaim this to the ends of the earth to gather God's people for His kingdom. Another challenge is the text from Matthew 13:41 where we read that *the angels will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

Regardless, of the identification of the angels, the point of the text is that the coronation of the king in heaven will result in an ingathering of God's chosen people from every corner of the world. The basis for the missionary work of the church to the nations is upon this coronation, as we are told: *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

### **THE NEARNESS OF HIS COMING: THE FIG TREE (Matthew 24:32-35)**

One of the most prominent trees surrounding 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine was the fig tree. The process of its growth and blossoming was well-known to any living in those days. This short parable teaches that when new leaves and the softening of the branches appeared, this was an indication that summer was on its way. It was also indicative that it wouldn't be long until its fruits would begin to appear. In the same way, those signs given would clearly point to the coming of the Son of Man. Some read more into the fig tree parable than necessary by arguing that it represents Israel, much like in Matthew 21:18-21. They point out that it must refer to the destiny of some future regeneration of Israel prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming at the end of history. These allude to the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 as the precursor to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. Keeping with the previous context and v.35, which defines the timing to which these things will happen, it is challenging to see how the Lord was thinking of a rebirth of Israel 2000 years later. To further this, Luke's rendition of the passage not only speaks of a fig tree, but also of

“all trees” (Luke 21:29) hence the emphasis is on the signs that precede rather than the tree itself. In the same way, the way they would know that it is near<sup>118</sup> was when they would see “these things”.

The pinnacle text to understanding the timing of these events is found in v.35 where the Lord states that *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place*. The initial question of the disciples was *when* “these things” would happen (referring to the destruction of the temple) and in this passage He is directly responding to the question. It would be sometime within that generation or roughly within a 40-year period. As we have noted above, the expression “this generation” is consistently used without exception of those living in the time in which He was declaring these words to them especially in reference to judgment<sup>119</sup>. Again, keeping in mind that Christ is referring to the question of the disciples as to “when” these things would happen, consider that in Jewish thought in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, a generation was considered as roughly a forty-year period. The destruction of the temple occurred roughly 40 years after these words were uttered. Many of my brothers and sisters who believe that this is still future have attempted to translate the term “*genea*” as “race” to argue for a class or people or specifically, that the Jewish race would not pass away until all these things are fulfilled. While I appreciate their sincerity, this interpretation is not persuasive since, while lexically permissible, there is nothing in Matthew or in the preceding texts to suggest this translation. Also, if we translate the term *genea* in this instance as “Jewish race”, then we are forced to also translate it elsewhere in this way. Would the following texts make sense if we utilize this translation?

“But to what shall I compare **the Jewish race**? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, (Matthew 11:16)

The men of Nineveh will stand up with **the Jewish race** at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise up with **the Jewish race** at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:41-42)

Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with **the evil Jewish Race.**” (Matthew 12:41-42)

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon **the Jewish race.** (Matthew 23:36)

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<sup>118</sup> The insertion in most translation of the personal pronoun “He” is possible however the neuter (it) is also a strong possibility. Storms writes: *If masculine, it likely refers to the vindication of Jesus as seen in his coming in judgment. Or it could be that the coming of Jesus to the Ancient of Days in heaven is near or close at hand (Daniel 7:13-14). If neuter, it refers to the desolation, desecration and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.* (Storms P. 275) While possible, Luke’s version of this text speaks of the Kingdom of God being nearby which leads me to believe that it is speaking of the coming of Christ to the Ancient of Days.

<sup>119</sup> Matthew 11:16; 12:39-42; 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36.

The following translation in these other texts makes really no sense and are we prepared to call the entire Jewish race “evil”?<sup>120</sup> To communicate a race rather than a generation, the term “*genos*” would have clarified the issue since it generally utilized to convey the idea of a race of people rather than “*genea*”.<sup>121</sup> As we previously saw in Matthew 23:35-36, the words of the Lord indicate that those who were identified as “this generation” were to receive retribution for the guilt of the blood of the prophets fall upon them. The judgment of “this generation” is a judgment upon “you” (2<sup>nd</sup> person plural), those with whom He was conversing and who would commit the ultimate sin in the crucifixion of the Son of God.

V. 36 confirms the certainty of the Lord’s words as to the fulfillment of the preceding texts. His words are permanent and established, they are faithful and in return will surely come to pass. There was a better change for heaven and earth to pass away than for His words to do so. He is saying that His words are reliable and true, and those things did come to pass!

France summarizes this section well:

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

## INTERLUDE

There is a dynamic on what the Lord Jesus purposed in His first coming and what He has in store in His second. Most students of scripture are prepared to acknowledge that Jesus brought salvation in His first coming (Ephesians 2:8-9) and will bring a final salvation in His second (Romans 5:9), but when it comes to bringing judgment, they completely focus upon the judgment at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. My general outlook of the redemptive history is that, while Christ brought salvation at His first coming and will bring in a final salvation at His second coming, the same can be said about His promised judgment. That judgment brought at His first coming happened in history shortly after His ascension and coronation as King. It was a judgement upon those who called for His death and finally rejected Him as Messiah. In the following passages, we will see a switch from the judgment of the first coming to a judgment that is focused upon His second coming. While v.4-35 answer the first question of the disciples as to when would these things be (every stone to be torn down), vs. 36 – 25:46 speak of what would be the sign of His coming at the end of the age. *The unexpected and unpredictable arrival of the Parousia is described in a collection of shorter sayings in 24:36-44, and this programmatic section is then underlined by a series of three parables (24:45-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-30) which all focus on the theme of awaiting the imminent arrival of an authority figure, and the need to have made appropriate provision so as to not be caught unprepared*

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<sup>120</sup> In Acts 4:20, Peter exhorts his listeners to be saved from this perverse “genea”, would it make sense for him to call them to be saved from the Jewish race recognizing that he himself was an ethnic Jew?

<sup>121</sup> While “Jewish Race” has been a favourite translation for futurist, others have preferred “Nation” or “Israel” which all create the same problem in contextually defining the term.

*and punished*<sup>122</sup>. The last portion of the discourse is a vivid description of the final judgment to come to this world at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ at the end of human history. Let's consider the transition in v.37:

1. There seems to be a transition in focus in the term “but about”<sup>123</sup>. It's usage elsewhere points to an introduction to something new. Paul utilizes it to shift from subject to subject in his epistles. (1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 5:1)
2. There is also a noticeable transition from using the plural “those days” in the preceding texts to the singular “that day and hour”. It speaks most likely of moving from a more general timeframe (those days) to a very specific time (*that* day).
3. There are prediction statements within the passages in vs.4-35 that allow the reader (and listener) to identify signs that will announce His coming (i.e., Abomination of Desolation, the blossoming of the fig tree). While in vs.36 and on, there is a linguistic switch to convey that there will be no indicators of His coming. He warns of preparations to be made so that no that they won't be caught off-guard. There is no warning for that day, only a call to be ready for it.
4. There is a switch in language especially that our English term “coming” doesn't reflect. In vs.4-35, the primary term used for coming is *erchomenos* while beginning in vs.36, the switch to *Parousia* has prevalence. As we have seen, the first seems to be speaking in terms of identifying this “coming” with Daniel 7 while *Parousia* seems to take over as the primary term to announce His “coming”.

The shift in language seems to communicate a switch in topic from answering the first question of the disciples to now addressing the 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is also why I believe that the expression *end of the age* is probably speaking of the end of history rather than speaking of the end of the Jewish age.

## **NO ONE KNOWS (Matthew 24:36-41)**

The Lord Jesus now turns His attention to “that day” in v.36 by pointing to a more specific and determined time. This is associated with the OT expression the *day of the Lord*<sup>124</sup> or similarly stated earlier in the gospel of Matthew as *the day of judgment*<sup>125</sup>. *That phrase, with reference to the final Judgment, must have been a familiar one to the disciples who would perceive it as the answer to their question concerning the time of the end of the age (24:3)*<sup>126</sup>. It is a day that the wrongs of this world will finally be set right and that justice and righteousness will be put on full display. The secrecy behind the *Parousia* is clearly portrayed as that great day that is reserved to God the Father for His coming

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<sup>122</sup> France P. 936

<sup>123</sup> Greek: *Peri de*

<sup>124</sup> Isaiah 13:6, 9

<sup>125</sup> Matthew 7:22, 10:15;11:22-24, 12:36 – Also see 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:12,18; 4:8; Jude 6.

<sup>126</sup> J Marcellius Kik, P. 68

judgment. While the timing of that day is kept from the disciples, it is also kept from the angels as well as the Son Himself.

What exactly will things look like in the last days of history prior to this day of judgment? Much like they do today! The Lord compares the day of His Parousia to the days when Noah walked the earth just prior to the coming of the judgment of God in the flood. Those days were filled with the normal tendencies of men such as to eat, drink and to marry. There was nothing out of the ordinary and no indication that judgment was coming upon them. Notice that this happens “until that day that Noah entered the ark”. The day that he entered his vessel, the judgment began, and the inhabitants knew that something terrible was coming. There is a contrast between “those days” that the people were engaging in everyday life, and “that day” that when the judgment began<sup>127</sup>.

Vs.40-41 are generally associated by futurists with the rapture of the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. When the Lord returns, some will be taken up to heaven to meet the Lord prior to the judgment while others will continue to go on with their lives on the earth. One will be taken, and one will be left behind. What we must consider prior to advancing this interpretation is what the text doesn't say. The text doesn't say *where* they'll be taken or even *why* they are taken. The other thing we must consider prior to addressing the interpretation of this text is that this is directly linked with the days of Noah. In the story of Noah, who was taken and who was left? Noah and his family were the ones who remained, and the rest were taken away by the flood in judgment. The term “taken” is better rendered as being taken in judgment. The parallel text in Luke seems to substantiate this interpretation. *I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.”] And answering they \*said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”* (Luke 17:34-37). The question of the disciples in v.37 “where Lord?” is in reference to where those that are taken would be brought. His answer is “where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered. This is referring to bodies that have died! In other words, those that are taken, are killed in judgment, not raptured off the earth in safety. When the Lord returns, the judgment will be swift and those who are said to “remain” will be saved while those who are “taken” will fall under the judgment of God<sup>128</sup>.

The focal point of the Lord Jesus' saying is to warn His disciples and future generations who are awaiting His coming that there will be no warning signs and that we should be ready. Life will be normal, and then suddenly that day will come upon the earth. *It will be as it was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they*

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<sup>127</sup> This in contrast to some who see the moral corruption in the world getting at its peak prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. In Noah's and Lot's days, these moral corruptions were severe (Genesis 6:11; 19:1-11)

<sup>128</sup> Some have argued that the conditions in Noah's day will reflect a time of unprecedented evil in this world where the mass of people will be morally corrupt to the extent that there may be few believers in this world. The reference to Noah's text is focused upon the similarities with the way people are living their lives in everyday activities. There isn't a focus in this text however upon societal decay or just how many people on this earth will be believers. If anything, we are told that the kingdom will grow into a great tree and that it will permeate the whole lump (Matthew 13:31-33)

*were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:28-30). The apostle Paul refers to individuals in that same period While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3).*

## **BE ON ALERT FOR HIS COMING (Matthew 24:42-51)**

While many will be eating, drinking, and marrying in those days, with no thought as to the finality at hand, the Lord teaches His disciples to be on alert for that day. The preparations in mind are not in storing food or drink, but in living a life that produces good fruit to offer to their master when He comes. His return will be a sudden and unexpected event and we must all be ready for the day when the Lord comes to gather His people and judge the wicked. This readiness is compared to the head of a house being prepared for the coming of a burglar. The theme of the thief in the night is used widely in the New Testament when discussing to the coming of the Lord<sup>129</sup>. The head of a house was responsible for the well-being of his family and his possessions. If he knew the timing of the coming thief, he would not be caught off-guard. He would prepare for the invasion of his home and deal appropriately with this brigand. This mindset of "readiness" should also be kept in the minds of Christians because the coming of the Son of Man will happen at a time when you won't think it will.

We are then introduced to another parable about how to react in the absence of a master. While the description could be of two slaves (mainly a faithful and sensible slave, and an evil slave), it could be speaking of one slave, with two possible reactions to the master's absence. Either way, the essence of the parable is quite clear. The slave that takes care of the master's household is faithful and sensible, while the slave who is evil beats the other slaves. This evil slave carries on in the same way as those in the days of Noah, eating and drinking, and in return, not taking care of the household, all because he doesn't expect him to return anytime soon. When the master returns from his long journey, there is no announcement of his coming, but a sudden appearing. That appearing is not met in a positive fashion but with retribution. That slave is "cut in two" and assigned a place with the damned where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The same place where the hypocrites dwell. Interestingly, this same terminology is used exclusively in the gospel of Matthew for the religious leaders. They were not to be like the religious leaders who didn't bear good fruit but to continue to work for the master faithfully even if they didn't know the time of His return. The latter expression is used throughout the gospel relating to the judgment to come upon those unfaithful to the Lord

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<sup>129</sup> Jesus' metaphor of the coming of a burglar as a model for the unexpected time of the Parousia made a strong impression on the early church: cf. Luke 12:39; 1 Thess 5:2,4; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15; Gos. Thom.21,103. (France P. 942)

## **THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING & THE PARABLE OF THE 10 VIRGINS (Matthew 25:1-13)**

The Lord follows the previous parable with another parable to speak of the significance of readiness for “that day/hour”. This one introduces another kingdom-style parable with the phrase “The Kingdom of God”. The coming of the Lord will be compared (future tense) to 10 virgins who took their lamps to meet a bridegroom, a representation of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 9:15). These were carrying lamps along with oil for their journey. These girls were part of the procession to a wedding feast, but we are not told what relationship they held with the bridegroom or the party. We are merely told that the travel was by night and that they were to meet him and accompany him to the celebration. Five of these girls were “prudent” and brought oil while the other half were foolish and neglectful. The parable then moves to moment when the bridegroom arrives. There story indicates that the virgins anticipated to meet the bridegroom at an expected time but suddenly were startled by his coming. This coming is announced with a shout or a loud call to come to meet Him. It is important to note that each of these virgins had fallen asleep and all brought their lamps. The difference between them was the preparedness of the 5 wise girls. They had prepared to go the whole way with him while the others did not. The story tells us that all stood up and made their way to meet him. The 5 wise girls easily lit their lamps with the oil and made their way to him while the 5 unwise girls lit their lamps also but didn’t have enough oil to keep them going. They asked the 5 prudent girls for oil but were refused. They recommended that they purchase their own and they went away to buy more oil for the journey. Carrying the lamps were a part of the procession to accompany the bridegroom to the wedding feast. The bridegroom arrives and without delay, the wedding feast began with those girls who had arrived and without the others. When the 5 foolish girls eventually arrived, it was too late because the door was shut! Their call to be allowed entrance into the feast was met with the words “I don’t know you”. The answer from the bridegroom were meant to disassociate himself from them. They had not taken the proper care to assure that they’d be able to make the full journey and in return he no longer cared to know them. They had dishonoured him with their lack of care for his great day.

The warning then is to be on alert but also to be ready for that day/hour. Being prepared for the coming of the Lord is not something that can be relied upon by others to provide. Christians must be prepared for that day by their own means should not be taken by surprise when the shout comes of His arrival. The language of a door being shut is used throughout scripture in eschatological contexts of those who are damned who were probably familiar with the Lord but missed the mark when demonstrating the basis for their faith in Him (Matthew 7:21-23). This is what the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ will entail, many will predict and expect Him to return at a specific time, yet He will come suddenly and without warning.

## **THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING & THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Matthew 25:14-30/ Mark 13:34/ Luke 19:11-27)**

This next parable takes on a similar outcome as the aforementioned parables but from a different perspective. The emphasis is identifying the means by which we must prepare for the unexpected coming of the Lord Jesus. It speaks of a wealthy master who gives a hefty sum to three of his servants while he goes off on a long journey. The money was distributed in an uneven fashion with one receiving

5 talents, another 3 and finally the third servant received 1 talent. The two first servants utilize the money to grow the wealth of their master while the third digs a hole to hide the money which produces no benefit for the master. When he returns, the two first servants have doubled their portion for him, but the last servant produced no results. The two first servants are rewarded by coming into the joy of their master while the third is thrown out into outer darkness. But why give a different amount to each of these servants? It demonstrates that some are given a much greater obligations and occasions to please their master. It shows that it is not about the amounts given to the servants but what they did with what they were given. The servants who were given more probably had proven themselves to be entrusted with more. They should be working to grow what they have received! The fervour by which the two first servants go out to grow their master's is expressed in the term "immediately". They didn't waste time in accomplishing their duty to him. Instead of siding with safety, as the third servant did, they took a chance and traded to grow the sum.

Notice that the two first servants received the same commendation! The third servant is called lazy. His protectionist mentality and his view of his master as "hard" certainly demonstrate that he didn't really know his master. If he was willing, even to produce a little, such as interest in the bank, it would have sufficed to please his master.

In the end, those who produced a benefit from what they had received will enter into the joy of the master while the servant who produced nothing, will be thrown out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The last servant wasn't scolded for doing something wrong, but for doing nothing at all.

We should highlight prior to moving on that from v. 19 that the master is not gone for a short period of time, but his return is said to be "after a long time". It's important to note that this is referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. *This parable simply assumed that the "imminent" Parousia will not be immediate*<sup>130</sup>.

## **THE 2<sup>ND</sup> COMING TO BRING SALVATION & JUDGMENT (Matthew 25:31-46)**

This last section is crucial to understanding the purpose and results of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. While the previous parables spoke of the demeanour that disciples of Christ should exhibit (producing good fruits and being on alert), the following text focus upon the event itself. He is now describing the crescendo of what "that day/hour" will look like (24:36).

The following passages tell of the great and final judgment when the Lord Jesus returns. The great king will return as the judge. The judgment brought is not in the context of the temple and "this generation" as in 24:30,35, but this time in the context of judging *the nations*. The setting describes, not necessarily a coming to the earth, as much as a displaying the authority He has as the Son of Man being enthroned

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<sup>130</sup> France P. 954

and judging the world. He will then divide the nations into two specific groups, the saved and the lost, which He compares to “the sheep and the goats”<sup>131</sup>. How do we relate the “nations” with the division of the “sheep & goats”? The language of “nations” probably references the collective entirety of humans on the earth, in the same way that the wheat and tares grow together in a field, and they are placed in one area for a purpose while the other in a different area for a different end<sup>132</sup>. The text is largely reiterating previous parables and statements made from the Lord throughout the gospel. It stresses the significance of producing good fruits and demonstrates that there is a basis for which it will be central to the last judgment. Some have argued that it is the works of kindness that are the basis for whether one receives eternal life or eternal damnation. As I examine these texts, I don’t want to minimize the importance of caring for others and the duty of the Christian to love and help the less fortunate in society. However, if we are sticking with the text, we need to admit that the people to whom the clothing, feeding, tending to their illness, granting hospitality, and visiting in prisons, were explicitly the disciples. These explicit acts of kindness towards even one of these brothers of Christ, even to the least of them, was implicitly doing it for the Lord Himself. Those “brothers” were heralds of the gospel and would struggle through their ministry, even to the point of being thrown in prison, were the responsibility of Christians to care for. These were His true family (Matthew 12:46-50) and to welcome the little child who “believe in me”, was to welcome Him (Matthew 18:5-6). It wasn’t necessarily the earning of salvation in these deeds that is in question but the demonstration of the faith and salvation that was received in the love for one another.

The result of the two groupings is found in the words of v.46: *These (the goats) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*” The righteous will be placed at His right hand, the place of honour and will be “blessed” of the Father. They will come into His joy in the inheritance of His kingdom which was prepared before the foundation of the world. But the kingdom that they are entering, seems to denote them also becoming kings themselves and sharing in Christ’s kingdom (Matthew 19:28)<sup>133</sup>. The expressions “go away...into eternal life” and “inherit the kingdom” are both simultaneously a blessing that will finally be achieved at the resurrection of the dead. While the term “come” is used of these sheep, the opposite “depart from me” is used of those who are the goats. The destination of those on the left is poised for eternal fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. They were a part of the devil’s kingdom while on the earth and will continue to be located with him in eternity (Daniel 12:2).

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<sup>131</sup> The motif of an ultimate division between the saved and the lost has recurred in many different contexts in the gospel; see especially 7:13-27; 8:11-12; 10:32-33; 13:40-43, 49-50; 16:25-26, and the whole of 24:36-25:30. (France P.961)

<sup>132</sup> The language of the sheep and goat is similar to Ezekiel 34:17 but in Ezekiel, it seems to refer to a division within Israel (my flock).

<sup>133</sup> Also see 1 Corinthians 4:8; Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6 and 22:5

## APPENDIX A: KEY TEXTS

### **THE FUTURE COMING AFTER ISRAEL IS EVANGELIZED (Matthew 10:23)**

A solemn warning was issued to the disciples who desired to follow our Lord Jesus. The warning is to realistically weigh the cost of taking on this immense responsibility. In Matthew 10:16-22, the Lord Jesus lays out what they could expect going out as heralds of the Kingdom of the Messiah but also how they should act and respond to this persecution that they would endure. They could assume persecution for their efforts coming from many various sources including those closest to them. With that said, they were to be *shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves*, not worrying about what to say, since the Spirit would be with them to speak in them.

In v.23, the Lord gives them instructions to flee that city in which they were tasked to evangelize and move on to the next whenever they experienced this persecution. His message brings a sense of urgency and haste to move things along quickly to get through the cities. The Lord Jesus then makes an astonishing claim "*truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.*" Prior to completing their journey of bringing the message of the Kingdom to cities of Israel, the events surrounding the coming of the Son of man would happen. The coming of the Son is local (cities of Israel) and related to those evangelists standing there in front of Him. It was "you" (2<sup>nd</sup> person plural) that would be sent, and in return, these same disciples would be the ones who would not complete going through the cities of Israel prior to His coming.

The "coming" is linked to the coming prophesied in Daniel 7:13-14 whereas the Messiah would come, not to the earth, but to the Ancient of Days where He would be crowned King. The Messiah would be given dominion, glory and a kingdom that would never be destroyed. His coronation as King of Israel would happen prior to these disciples evangelising Israel. Many interpret this text as fulfilled at the resurrection and at the ascension. While this is certainly plausible, it fails to take into account the haste by which they needed to get the evangelism completed. If this was speaking of the resurrection and ascension, then why the need to rush through the cities? Another point to consider is that the disciples were not persecuted in the way that vs. 16-22 describes up to the time of the resurrection. We can ascertain however that this would make better sense in connecting this to the Lord's coming in judgment of Israel (linked to the cities of Israel). There was a coming so close that they would barely have time to evangelize the cities of Israel before this happening. The most probable event, taking into consideration the book of Acts and the evangelism/persecution of the disciples was the destruction and dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 70.

### **THE COMING IN GLORY: A PRECURSOR (Matthew 16:27-28)**

The Lord spoke clearly of His impending suffering and death in Jerusalem at the hands of the leaders of Israel. Peter is rebuked for his opposition to this, and the Lord commands him to set his mind on the things of God rather than the things of man speaking of the necessity of finishing the work that the Father had given Him. He then turns to the disciples to clarify the cost of discipleship once again. One

who wishes to follow the Lord must be willing to deny himself even to the point of death. To gain their lives by not forfeiting them in this life was to lose it in the next. The work of discipleship may cost him his earthly life but the life that he will gain is one that will be far better.

V. 27 begins with the term "for" which links the preceding verses with the upcoming statement about His coming in glory. The coming of the Lord Jesus in glory echoes Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man was "coming" but it was not to the earth that He was "coming" but to the Ancient of Days where He was crowned King. The Messiah would be given dominion, glory and a kingdom that would never be destroyed. The Lord then quotes Psalm 62:12 & Proverbs 24:12. The context behind Psalm 62 is the teaching to place your hope in God only and rely entirely upon Him for your salvation. There were many vain things that men placed their trust but hope and salvation were found only in Him. Vs. 11-12 of the Psalm speak of God having the power to judge and those men will be judged according to their works. The text in Proverbs 24 is similar in that it speaks of God being the one who "weighs the hearts" and "keeps the soul" to which He is being the judge renders to each man according to their works.

In V. 28, we now have a peculiar phrase where the Lord Jesus speaks of the nearness of this event in stating that some who were standing right in front of Him would not taste death until they see Him in glory. The expression clearly indicates that some in His presence would still be alive when the Son of Man comes in the glory of His Father. For most interpreters, this creates a dilemma since they view v.27 as happening at the end of the history all the while it indicates something that is destined to happen in just a few short years. There are several interpretations that have been offered in finding the answer to this predicament. Seeing the Son of Man coming in His glory is thought to be linked to seeing Him raised from the dead or as many have argued that it relates to the transfiguration<sup>134</sup>. While there are more than a few problems to this interpretation, the main issue becomes in what way will the Lord "repay every man according to His deeds" at this time? The "coming in glory" seems to communicate that a judgment is coming at His coronation which would happen in a few short years after this saying. This seems to be better appropriated with the judgment upon Jerusalem albeit even for a partial-preterist, this text is extremely challenging.

### **THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WILL SEE HIM COMING (Matthew 26:64)**

The Lord's arrest brought Him before Caiaphas the High Priest, the Scribes, and elders (Matthew 26:57). They gathered as a council in an attempt to find a charge to lay upon Him. Their desperation to do away with Him resulted in two false witnesses coming forward and their accusation was based upon a false rendition of what He said earlier about destroying the temple and that He would raise it up again in 3 days (John 2:19). The Lord made no mention of destroying the temple, simply rebuilding it! The silence

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<sup>134</sup> Carson writes: "*Many have held that this verse refers to the Transfiguration, the very next pericope in both Matthew and Mark. The problem is twofold. First, "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see" is an extraordinary way to refer to Peter, James and John who witness the Transfiguration a mere six days later (17:1). Second, as magnificent as the Transfiguration was, it is not entirely clear how the Son of Man comes in his kingdom (Matt) of the kingdom comes in power (Mark) through this event.*" (The Expositor's Bible Commentary, D.A. Carson, Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, P. 380)

of the Lord was deafening to the high priest, and he began to intensify his attack. He had previously claimed authority as the Son of David, and we can rest in the fact that His public woes against them left a terrible impression upon them (Matthew 23:13-33). Caiaphas' persistence resulted in the question relating to whether or not He was the Messiah and, in return, the Son of God. The Jews were looking for a verbal confession to charge Him with blasphemy and they got their wish.

When the Lord finally responds to their request, and it certainly created a reaction. He affirms by their own words that they had told the truth and agreed. He was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God! What is fascinating is that He doesn't stop there. Now, it's His turn to "tell" them something further about the claim. Now only was the temple of His body going to be rebuilt in three days and that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, but that the high priest, the scribes, and elders "you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64). The response was in the form of quoting two OT passages regarding the Messiah. One from Psalm 110:1 and the other from Daniel 7:13-14. Both texts point to the enthronement of the Messiah and clearly answered their question in the affirmative if they hadn't clued in. But what is fascinating about this passage is not only His affirmation as Messiah, but that these religious leaders would "see" Him sitting at the right hand and coming on the clouds. These accusers would understand that He was who He claimed to be and hence this enthronement and coming<sup>135</sup> on the clouds of judgment against them. This was to be experienced by those standing before Him in judgment. The tables would turn, and it would be His turn to judge those who condemned Him to death.

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<sup>135</sup> Coming is *erchomai* as in Matthew 24:30