

**The
Coming
Of Christ
In Matthew
24**

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The discourse that Jesus gave in Matthew 24 was given after He had cursed the Scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23 with “Woe to you” seven or eight times. He ended the diatribe of chapter 23 by pronouncing the following prophecy.

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate... (Mat 23:34-38).

Notice that He said that this destruction and judgment on Jerusalem would happen in that generation.

Then, as He was leaving the Temple and His disciples were pointing out the beautiful buildings of the Temple, He prophesied that not one stone (of the Temple) would be left standing on another. The disciples then took Him apart and asked when this would happen and what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age.

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age” (Mat 24:3)?

Because His answer took place on the Mount of Olives, this is called the Olivet Discourse. It is also recorded in Luke 21 and Mark 13. Could John’s version be the Book of Revelation? It seems so.

Why did the disciples seem to equate “the sign” of His coming and “the end of the age” with the destruction of the Temple? The answer is that they had read in Daniel where Daniel seemed to equate His coming with the destruction of the Temple.

And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (Dan 9:27).

The angel had told Daniel, "when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished" (Dan 12:7). The "power of the holy people" was their Temple. So they were expecting it to happen at the end of the 70 weeks of Daniel (Dan 9) at the time of "Messiah the Prince" and at the time of the "Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven" to the Ancient of Days to receive His eternal Kingdom (See Dan 12:7 and 7:13). They knew that when these things were fulfilled, it would be the end of the Old Testament age and the beginning of the age of Messiah the Prince. With no Temple, there could be no priesthood and animal sacrifices. It would be impossible to obey the ceremonial Law of Moses.

Jesus then went on to answer their question first as to the sign, and finally as to when. In verse 34 He repeats what He had said before in 23:36. The whole prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 is sandwiched by the two statements that declared that these things would happen in that generation.

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

All what things? Obviously the things He had just listed as to the sign of His coming and the end of the Old Testament age. We say "Old Testament age" because it was the only age they knew of. At this time they were not concerned, nor did they believe there would be an end of the eternal Messianic age. Daniel had told that the kingdom of God would last forever.

First He lists some things that might appear to be the sign of His coming but were not. He says that these were simply the beginning of sorrows, but not the end (v. 8).

1. False Christs

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (vs. 4,5).

Josephus show us that this prophecy was fulfilled when many false leaders arose to deceive the Jews into rebellion against Rome. This led to the Roman invasion to destroy Jerusalem. John also tells us that not only had the antichrist come, but many antichrists had already come when he wrote 1 John 4:3.

2. Wars

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows (vs. 6-8).

Historians tell us that civil war broke out all over the empire, from Britain to the Middle East, in the days preceding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

3. Persecution

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another (vs. 9,10).

We know from reading Acts and history that this was also fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem. Not to mention the persecution by the Jews in Acts, Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome for three and half years from A.D. 64 to 68. Both Peter and Paul were killed at that time.

4. The Preaching of the Gospel in All the World

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (v. 14).

The Apostle Paul says that this had already been fulfilled before he died.

...the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister (Col 1:23).

...the gospel, which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world (Col 1:5,6)

5. The Abomination of Desolation

Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are

nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath (vs. 15-20).

Luke's version explains what the "abomination of desolation" was. He calls it "Jerusalem surrounded by armies."

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-24).

Why does Luke not use the same terminology as Matthew? Because Matthew wrote in the actual language of Jesus (Aramaic), and Luke interpreted the teaching in Greek. (Note that Luke also says this would be the fulfillment of "all things which are written.")

When the Jews rebelled against Rome, the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem, and then, for some unknown reason, left. The Jews then ambushed them while they made their way to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Jews won the day and were thus sent a great delusion (See 2 Thess 2:11) by thinking that they could overthrow Rome. Then Rome gathered a great army from all over the world and invaded in A.D. 66. That began the three and a half year great tribulation.

6. The Great Tribulation

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be (v. 21).

This period of tribulation was certainly the worse thing that had ever happened to the Jews and is the worse thing that will ever happen to them. What could be worse than Jehovah divorcing His bride?

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons" (Mat 21:40,41).

But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding” (Mat 22:7-9).

God divorced his previous bride for adultery and married the Church which is made up of “as many as you find.” That included Gentiles.

7. The Falling Stars

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (v. 29).

This is the same thing that happened to Babylon when the Medes overcame it. It happened to Egypt when overcome by Babylon. It happened to Idumea, also. Observe how Jesus used the same symbolic and apocalyptic language that the prophets used under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit.

God said to Egypt, “When *I* put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land,’ Says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 32:7,8). God said to Idumea, “Though you ascend *as* high as the eagle, And though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down” (Obadiah 1:4). God said to Babylon, “For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine” (Isaiah 13:10). All Bible commentaries agree that these Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Old Testament times.

Stars are a symbol for leaders of nations or for celebrities. The rulers of Jacob’s family, for example, were seen as stars in Joseph’s dream. We still use the same terminology today. They are the so-called “powers” of the heavens. Jesus was saying that the rulers of Jerusalem would fall at the end of the tribulation period.

8. The Sign of the Son of Man In Heaven

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (v.30).

What was the sign that appeared? It was the destruction of Jerusalem. What a great sign that was! It was *the sign* that Jesus had fulfilled all prophecy. He said, “For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22). Through that sign, every eye saw Him coming to the Ancient of Days in the clouds with power and great glory. They did not see Him in the flesh. They saw Him through the sign. (Note that His coming was pictured in Daniel as going up, and not as coming down.)

9. The Great Commision

And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (v. 31).

His angels are his messengers, the apostles. He sent them to gather His elect, not just Jews, from one end of heaven (beyond the horizon) to the other. His call was no longer limited to the house of Israel, but now extended universally to all the world. He said, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding (Mat 22:9).

Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! (Rev 19:9)

8. The Fig Tree of That Generation

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place (vs. 32-34)!

The fig tree is a symbol of Israel. When these words of Jesus were fulfilled, they were to know that “all these things” that He had just prophesied were about to take place. Then they would be fulfilled in that generation. That is why John said that he knew it was the last hour since the antichrist had already come. Christ indicated nine times in Revelation that those things were about to take place soon. They did. God’s Word is true.

The atheist, Bertrand Russell, said that Jesus and the apostles were false prophets because they said those things would happen in that generation and they did not. Could the problem be that they were false prophets, or that Russell’s method of interpretation was false? Paul said, “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). But just as Bertrand Russell falsely interpreted these prophecies, so many Bible scholars have done the same.

Some of the modern scholars who agree with this interpretation of fulfilled prophecy are R.C. Sproul, John Bray, David Chilton, R.J. Rushdoony, Andrew Sandlin, Gary DeMar, and many others. Mathew Henry says, “The prophecy of divers events, especially referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the utter ruin of the Jewish church and nation, which were not hastening on, and were completed about forty years after; the prefaces to that destruction, the concomitants and consequences of it; yet looking further, to Christ’s coming at the end of time, and the consummation of all things, of which that was a type and figure.”

C.S. Lewis says these statements by Jesus and the Apostles are one of the “great embarrassments” to the Church. In his essay on *The World’s Last Night* he discusses the problem with the statement by Jesus that His coming would take place in that generation (Mat 24:34).

But there is worse to come. “Say what you like,” we shall be told, “the apocalyptic beliefs of the first Christians have been proved to be false. It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, “this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.” And He was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.

It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible.¹

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960, 97–98.

Lewis goes on to offer his solution to the dilemma. He says that because Jesus was both man and God, his human side was mistaken. The problem with that solution is that Jesus was not giving His opinion; He was prophesying. That would make Him a false prophet. At least Lewis is honest enough to admit the problem is there. The solution offered here presupposes the infallible inspiration of Scripture, and offers the only logical solution the author can see. Perhaps there has been a failure to see that the prophecy *was* fulfilled in the same sense as all the other Old Testament “comings” of the Lord were fulfilled.

When God Came Down

When He delivered David from his enemies

2 Sam 22:10 He bowed the heavens also, and **came down** With darkness under His feet.

When He destroyed Babel

Gen 11:5 But the LORD **came down** to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

When he visited Abraham and Sarah

Gen 18:14 “Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time **I will return to you**, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

When He came to deliver Israel from Egypt

Exo 3:8 “So **I have come down** to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

When He spoke to Moses

Exo 19:11 “And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD **will come down** upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

Exo 19:20 Then the LORD **came down** upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

When He delivers His people

Psa 144:5 Bow down Your heavens, O LORD, and **come down**; Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.

When Egypt was defeated

Isa 19:1 The burden against Egypt. Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, And **will come into Egypt**; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. [Fulfilled when Babylon conquered Egypt.]

When Babylon was defeated

Isa 13:5 **They come** from a far country, From the end of heaven-- **The LORD and His** weapons of indignation, To destroy the whole land.

When He delivered Jerusalem from Assyria

Isa 31:4b,8 So the LORD of hosts **will come down** To fight for Mount Zion and for its hill. Then Assyria shall fall by a sword not of man. [Fulfilled in Isaiah's day.]

When He destroyed Jerusalem

Rev 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him

The “coming with the clouds” is a reference to Daniel 7:13 where the Son of Man is seen ascending to the Ancient of Days.

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13.14).

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