

## Matthew 24 and the Coming of Christ

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The theme of this lectureship is that which we often refer to as “The end of time” or “The second coming of Christ.” Rarely is this event mentioned that the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24:1-51 are not ultimately brought into the conversation.

The importance of that time, that is, the second coming of Christ, cannot be overemphasized. Everyone will be there. We will stand alone and be judged according to God’s standard, the Bible. We will be judged according to what we have said and have failed to say. We will be judged relative to what we have done and what we have failed to do. The verdict given on that occasion will be immutable. Our destiny will be sealed from that moment.

Many fanciful theories exist relative to this event. One of the most popular beliefs evolving around this chapter is the doctrine of Premillennialism. This philosophy affirms that in this generation certain unmistakable signs will transpire before the second coming of Christ. These supposed “signs” are often referred to as “the signs of the times.” The theory holds that after His personal return to earth, He will set up His earthly Kingdom and reign from Jerusalem for a literal one thousand years.

When one looks closely at the tenor of our Lord’s words in this chapter, it is evident He had TWO different events under consideration. The words of Jesus in this chapter are in response to questions posed by His disciples. They had passed by the temple in Jerusalem and pointed out the buildings. History records that it was an impressive structure and at that time, had been under construction more than forty six years. Jesus then stuns them with the words, “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). Having arrived at the mount of Olives, the disciples posed the following question, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3).

The Lord’s words from this point through the end of chapter twenty-five are in response to the disciples questions in verse three. Many interpret the disciples words (verse 3) as one question. However, when studying Jesus’ answer, it is evident He answers two questions. Jesus answers the first question (“Tell us, when shall these things be?”) in verses 4-34 and the second question (“What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?”) in verses 35-51.

In the first section, Jesus referred to various signs which would transpire prior to the time one stone of the temple would not be left upon another (verse 2). This was fulfilled when the Romans came

and destroyed Jerusalem in A. D. 70. It is this event to which our Lord refers to in verses four through thirty-four.

However, after verse thirty-four, He does not mention a single sign which would come before the event mentioned in that section. Truly, the very tenor of His speech shows a clear distinction between the first and second section. In the first section, He spoke of signs that would transpire before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In this second section, He mentions no signs which would precede His coming to judge the world.

Notice that after Jesus said "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (verse 35), He immediately adds these sobering words, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (verse 36). It is clear He begins here to speak of His second coming to judge the world. It is so strange to me that many people look so earnestly at the previous signs but conveniently overlook there was coming a "day and hour" no man would know it.

If one believes the words of the Master, then He spoke of certain signs which would portend the fulfilling of "When shall these things be?" and then spoke of when heaven and earth would pass away, of which time no man would know. Man says he will know when Jesus is coming, but Jesus said man would not know the time. For me and my house, we will stand with Jesus.

Let us notice these signs mentioned by the Lord

1. False teachers – verse 5. Historians confirm many false teachers claiming to be the Messiah appeared on the scene just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.
2. Wars and Rumor of Wars – verse 6. It cannot be denied, from every section of the Roman empire, wars and revolts followed one another in succession
3. Famines and Pestilence – verse 7. Luke records that Agabus (Acts 11:28) prophesied of a great famine that was to come. He said it would be during the "days of Claudius Caesar" and history verifies this and many others during that time.
4. Earthquakes – verse 8. Historians verify that during the reign of Nero, many earthquakes occurred.
5. Disciples Delivered to Death – verse 9. It is a matter of inspiration the apostle James was put to death before the destruction of Jerusalem. Also, we are told that Paul, Peter, and James the less were slain for the cause of Christ before the fall of Jerusalem.
6. Apostasies – verses 10-13. Due to severe persecution, the faith of many disciples failed and they apostatized. This desertion of the Lord and His Truth extended to New Testament Christians who were willing to betray their brethren in Christ so they might be safe.
7. The Gospel Preached in All the World – verse 14. That this sign was actually fulfilled before Paul's death is clearly seen in Colossians 1:23. Here Paul wrote, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; for which I Paul am made a minister." Eusebius said "...the doctrine of the Saviour, like the rays of the sun, quickly irradiated

the whole world...Presently, in accordance with divine prophecy, the word of his inspired evangelists and apostles had gone throughout all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world (Boyle 52)."

Jesus then adds, "And then shall the end come." Premillennial advocates immediately conclude the "end" here mentioned is the end of the world. However, in just a few verses later, the Lord says, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34). If the speculations of the millennial group is accurate, then the end of the world came two thousand years ago or some of that generation are still alive on the earth today. They would make Methuselah look like a new born baby!

8. The Abomination of Desolation – verse 15. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (who so readeth, let him understand :)" In Luke's parallel account, he said "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." (Luke 21:20). Matthew has "abomination of desolation" while Luke has "armies." There can be no argument, the "abomination of desolation" was the Roman army, speculative millennialists notwithstanding.

Wallace says:

This description refers to the heathen symbols and the Roman standards raised in the temple. Every orthodox Jew looked upon the temple as sacred and holy. When the Romans conquered the city, and entered it, the Roman soldiers marched into the temple, hauled down the ornaments and images of the temple, and raised instead the symbols and standards of paganism and Romanism. That is what was called the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. The "abomination of desolation" was fulfilled when those Roman standards and pagan symbols were seen in the holy place 'where they ought not to be' (251).

9. The Disciples Were Told to Flee – verses 16-18. If this refers to the end of the world, what good would it do for one to flee to the mountains? The end of the world will be "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). It will be no advantage for one on the house top to heed Jesus' words here, "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house" (Matthew 24:17). But believing Jews, seeing the Romans in full march toward Jerusalem did exactly what Jesus said, they fled to places of refuge.
10. Hindrances in Their Flight from Jerusalem – verses 19-22. These verses deal with the impediments those who would flee the besieged city would face. If Jesus had reference here to the end of the universe, what difference would it be whether a woman was pregnant or not? Or whether she was nursing a baby? Does it really make a difference whether it is summer or winter when Jesus comes? But if we understand Him referring, not to the end of the world, but to the coming of the Romans in judgment against a wicked and rebellious people, then these statements are sensible.
11. False Signs – verses 23-26. If His disciples would heed the signs (false Christs, false prophets, false signs and wonders), this would enable them to escape the coming doom of Jerusalem.

12. The Eagles Gathering to the Carcass – verses 27-28. The gathering of the eagles to the carcass refers to the approaching Roman Armies. The unfruitful Jewish nation was the carcass which the Roman “eagles” (the standard of the Roman legions) would devour – this was truly “the coming of the Son of man.”
13. The Tribulation – verse 29. That which fell on the Jews in such a short time had not, to that point, been seen by mankind; and it has not been seen since. Josephus said:

Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand, the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [with the citizens of Jerusalem], but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a straitness among them, that there came a pestilential destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly (Whiston).

It is sobering to understand the one million, one hundred thousand deaths transpired in a period of no more than two months.

The darkening of the heavenly bodies does not refer to the literal sun, moon, and stars. This is in accord with prophetic language referring to the fall of dignitaries, authorities and powers. This is an allusion to the darkness that settled on the Jewish state. Isaiah (13:10) used the same terminology to refer to the demise of the Babylonian dignitaries. Joel (2:10) used the same language.

14. The coming of the Son of man – verse 30. The “sign of the Son of man” refers to the coming of Christ in judgment upon the wicked Jews. Notice the Master said, “and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.” Why did He use the word “tribes,” and not “people of the earth”? Simply because it was the nation of Israel that would fall. When every Jew throughout the world would learn of the disaster at Jerusalem, they (tribes) would mourn at this great calamity. The “sign of the Son of man” signaled Divine visitation on the Jews.
15. The Sending forth of His Angels – verse 31. Certainly this refers to the success of the gospel of Christ as it covered the “earth as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). The angels here are gospel messengers. The gathering of the elect from all points of the earth meant they would take the gospel into all the world. With the demise of Judaism, one of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the gospel was removed.
16. The signs of its imminence – verses 32-33. The signs mentioned in the previous verses would be foreshadow the doom of Jerusalem. If His disciples gave heed to His words, they would know the time of the destruction of Jerusalem was drawing near. Not only would they know when to flee the city, but after the great catastrophe befell the wicked nation and God’s wrath had been meted out to the Jews, there would also be a deliverance from the persecuting Jewish authorities.

If the expression “it is near” points to the end of the world or a “rapture” theory, then why did Jesus say “then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains” (Matthew 24:16). If the clause refers to the imagined “rapture,” the righteous person (the one to be raptured) certainly would have no desire to “flee to the mountains,” since he will supposedly be “caught up together with them in the clouds” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Furthermore, it would be ridiculous for the unrighteous to “flee to the mountains,” since (according to the fanciful philosophy) he will be left behind anyway!

Moreover, if the clause referred to the end of time, this would be universal in its scope. If something is universal in nature, it would be nonsensical to “flee to the mountains.” But this Jesus did not speak of something universal. It was limited to a specific region, a specific time, and a specific people – the destruction of a wicked nation because of their rejection of the Son of God.

17. The Fulfillment of All Things in That Generation – verse 34. Here Jesus clearly states that generation would not pass until “all these things be fulfilled.” Now, does “all these things” mean “some” of these things or “all” of these things? Anyone can see that Jesus spoke of things that would come *in that generation*.

But some argue the words “this generation” mean the race of the Jews. If that is true, this is an example of a truism par excellent. It is nonsensical to argue that Jesus said certain things would happen to the Jews and then have Him say the Jews would not pass away as a race until these things transpired! The fact is, Jesus said the then present generation would see these things come to pass and that generation did see them come to pass.

18. Jesus’ Words Shall Not Pass Away – verse. 35. The guarantee of the fulfillment of those signs promised to “this generation” in the previous verses is seen in the declaration “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” His word would stand and it would stand forever. What Jesus said would come to pass, would indeed come to pass. As relates to Matthew 24, what He said would come to pass did indeed come to pass – in that generation! It was those of the first century who were to see all these signs, not “we” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! It was the people of that generation who were to see all those signs and it was the people of that generation who did see those signs!

It is here we find the transition from the thoughts of the destruction of Jerusalem to the second coming of Christ to judge the world.

One only has to read this chapter to see the whole tenor of Jesus’ words change completely at this juncture. Previously, He spoke of sign after sign – from here on, He mentions not one single sign.

Jesus has now answered the first question, “Tell us, when shall these things be?” and spoke of many signs that would precede the time “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). Now the Lord proceeds to answer the second question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?”

19. The Coming of the Son of Man – verses 36-39. The words “But of that day and hour” (v. 36) are directly linked to “heaven and earth shall pass away” (v. 35). “Heaven and earth will pass away...but of that day and hour knoweth no man” is the connection to be made here. This is further elaborated upon in Jesus’ reference to the days before the flood; everything was continuing normally, just as they always had. In other words, just as there were no signs to tell of the universal flood, so there will be no signs to portend the coming of Christ to judge the world in righteousness.
20. One Shall Be Taken and the Other Left – verses 40-41. This is not a “rapture” passage. Rather it refers to the Lord’s second coming. One will be taken because he is found prepared. The other, who has not prepared himself, will be left. We must remember, this section is modified by the words, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (v. 42) and “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (v. 44). In the previous section, the disciples of the Lord would know of His coming (to judge a wicked nation through the instrument of the Roman army) by the signs mentioned. In this section, no one knows the time of His coming, and there will be no signs to forewarn us.
21. Watch – the Parable of the Faithful and Wise Servant – verses 42-51. The admonition is to “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (v. 42). How strange these words are when compared to premillennial prognosticators who tell us we will know by the signs that are to manifest themselves before His second coming. Surely all can understand the concept that if the good man had known when the thief would come,

The Lord then introduces a parable to set forth the proper application of His teaching relative to His second coming. It illustrates the rewards of the good and the evil. At the final judgment, the wicked will be consigned to that realm designated as “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Thus, the thrust of this section is, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (v. 42). It is imperative that all of us take seriously the teaching here presented for our consideration. Regardless of whether the Lord comes today or in a thousand years, we need to be prepared to meet the Lord.

Thus, as we look at Matthew 24 and the coming of Christ, we see two comings of our Lord. One, in Divine judgment upon a wicked, obstinate, and rebellious people. This was realized in the destruction of the nation of Israel in A. D. 70 by the Romans.

The second coming here considered is the Lord coming in judgment of the world. He will come in the clouds, resurrect the dead, change those that might be alive and then render judgment on every individual who has ever lived on the earth.

Let all of us seriously consider our standing before the Lord. May we be honest to look at ourselves through the ultimate standard, the gospel of Christ and be willing to make any necessary changes. We must always ‘Be ready.’

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