



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Four

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Four

Until now most of Jesus' teaching has been practical but here he will turn to the prophetic, a prediction of things that were yet to come. Yet he still accompanied his prophecies with practical advice as to how disciples should be prepared for what was to come and how they should act when it does occur.

As Jesus left his Father's house for the last recorded time, he responded to a comment about the beauty of Herod's temple by foretelling its pending destruction, a momentous occasion that came at the hands of the Roman army in AD70.

When he arrived on the Mount of Olives, he taught his disciples about the signs that would announce his Second Coming that would lead to a period of great suffering for those who had not chosen to come to God through him.

Jesus told them that they faced a period of persecution and warned them that false prophets and teachers would try to draw them away from the truth, something many disciples would do. They are called to stand firm, for it is those who endure to the end that will be saved. They need to ensure that the Gospel is taken to the entire world, something that must happen before Jesus shall return.

Jesus then provided a graphic account of the tribulation and the suffering it would cause that will include the long prophesied appearance of the abomination that causes desolation standing in God's temple. During that time false teachers would claim that the Messiah had already returned, which Jesus warns his disciples not to heed, for his true return will be seen by all - a truly unmissable event.

Jesus then went on to describe the cosmic signs that would announce his return. It is to be a global event, announced by the great trumpet of God and highly visible like flashes of lightening in a dark night sky.

Jesus uses an analogy in his teaching to state that, just as when a fig tree starts to blossom which indicates that summer is near, so too the signs that he had just spoken of will indicate his return is approaching.

Jesus then went on to teach on the need for all disciples to remain watchful, being prepared for his return, for no one knows when it will be other than God alone. He gives examples of how it will come suddenly and the impact that it will have on the saved and unsaved during their daily routine of life, citing the example of what happened to the unrepentant people at the time of Noah's flood, who had not heeded the warnings or signs.

In the parable of the Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave, Jesus spoke of the judgement that would come upon the unfaithful or false church leader who was caught out by the return of Christ, while the faithful leader would receive the reward of eternal life.

### **XIII. Matthew 24:1-25:46 - The Delay, Return, and Judgment of Messiah (Fifth [Olivet] Discourse)**

These two chapters are often called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives when he spoke these words. It is the fifth of Jesus' five major discourses recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Addressed to his disciples, it is intended to give them a prophetic overview of the events to transpire in both the near and distant future.

#### **XIII.a Matthew 24:1-14 - The beginning of birth pains**

Jesus previews the general conditions of the earth, which in some sense characterise the entire church age, before he returns: sufferings throughout the world (vv.4-8), the suffering of his disciples (vv.9-13), and the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (v.14).

##### **XIII.a.i Matthew 24:1-2 - The Destruction of the Temple Foretold**

Jesus had just concluded a confrontation with scribes and Pharisees in the temple. As he left, his disciples remarked on the beauty of Herod's temple to which Jesus replied that it was going to be destroyed.

Here, Jesus is warning followers who, like Peter, want an optimistic promise of the future, that realism is more important. His followers must be prepared to die for his honour before the coming of the end.

**<sup>1</sup> As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.**

#### **Matthew 24:1**

**Came out of the temple.** This is the last recorded time that Jesus was in the temple, his Father's house: <<*His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'*>> (John 2:17), perhaps giving a sign to those who had rejected him: <<*Woe to them indeed when I depart from them!*>> (Hosea 9:12b). Although this marks the end of his public ministry, the people were

not left without warning: <<*Take warning, O Jerusalem, or I shall turn from you in disgust, and make you a desolation, an uninhabited land*>> (Jeremiah 6:8). The road from Jerusalem to Bethany, where Jesus and his disciples probably stayed each evening, would take them up the Mount of Olives, which then afforded a spectacular view of the temple mount in the distance.

His disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. The temple was renowned for its beauty, even throughout the Roman world: <<*When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down’*>> (Luke 21:5-6). Israel had traditionally viewed the temple as invincible despite the warnings given: <<*Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’*>> (Jeremiah 7:4). Jesus, however, was not impressed by buildings. Indeed, his disciples should have realised it was not the building that was beautiful but the Spirit of the one who graced it with his presence: <<*The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Haggai 2:9). History, it seems, would be repeated: <<*And regarding this house, now exalted, everyone passing by will be astonished, and say, “Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this house?”*>> (2 Chronicles 7:21).

<sup>2</sup> Then he asked them, ‘You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’

### Matthew 24:2

Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of the temple was fulfilled in AD70 when the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Not one stone will be left here upon another may be intended as a metaphor for total destruction, or it may be understood as something that was literally fulfilled in the destruction of the temple building itself, but not the entire Temple Mount, some of which remains to this day.



Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem  
by Francesco Hayez

The prophet had posed a question long before, when the first temple was to be rebuilt: <<*But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord’s temple*>> (Haggai 2:15). What came to pass was the rejection of the Messiah in his own house by his own people; the primary cause for the destruction of the second temple.

All will be thrown down. Despite some of Jesus’ sayings being misinterpreted, for example: <<*Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I*

*will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the temple of his body>> (John 2:19-21), which was used erroneously during Jesus’ trial to mean that he intended to destroy the temple building himself: <<We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands”>> (Mark 14:58), Matthew and the other synoptic Gospel authors faithfully recorded Jesus’ prophecy that would be fulfilled less than 40 years after his death. Indeed, the destruction of the temple by the Roman soldiers made the area resemble a ploughed field, fulfilling yet another Scripture: <<Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height>> (Micah 3:12).*

Someone in the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, had once stated: <<If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation>> (John 11:48). They did not leave him alone and the Romans came anyway, used as an instrument of God.

Starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, there have been many scholars and critics that claim that either the Gospels were written after AD70 or the prophecies were added by someone else at a later date. They believed this because of the accuracy in the detail that Jesus gave surrounding these events. However, evidence for early publication and full acceptance that this prophecy was included in early reliable manuscripts refute this. Anyway, although Jesus’ words can mean nothing else other than the destruction of the temple complex, a fraudulent addition would surely have been even more detailed had it been added after the event!

#### XIII.a.ii Matthew 24:3-8 - Signs of the End of the Age

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus had a private conversation with his disciples, instructing them about the great Jewish tribulation of AD66-70 including the destruction of the temple; a period of even greater global tribulation that would commence with his Second Coming, and the associated signs and wonders that would accompany this momentous event. Thus the Olivet Discourse commences.

<sup>3</sup> When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’

#### Matthew 24:3

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives again appears to fulfil Scripture: <<And the glory of the Lord ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city>> (Ezekiel 11:23), which is Olivet.

On the Mount of Olives. Matthew’s version of this dialogue, with explicit mention of the Second Coming, is more developed and detailed than that given in the parallel passages that commence with the same two questions: <<Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?>> (Mark 13:4), and: <<They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this

*be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?'*>> (Luke 21:7). Refer to comments made on Matthew 21:1 for more information on the Mount of Olives.

When will this be. Like all disciples throughout the ages, they wanted to know at what specific time in history the Messiah would return to claim his inheritance and pass final judgement on the world. Yet such knowledge will never be revealed to humankind ahead of the time allocated: <<*He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority'*>> (Acts 1:7).

The disciples asked two questions:

1. When will this be?
2. What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

Jesus' answer to these questions apparently intertwines prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and his Second Coming. The near event, the destruction of Jerusalem, serves as a symbol and foreshadowing of the more distant event, the Second Coming. The discourse can be divided into three parts:

1. A generally chronological description of events preceding Christ's return (vv.4-31).
2. Lessons on watching, waiting, and being prepared for Christ's return (Matthew 24:36-25:30).
3. A warning of judgment and a promise of reward at the time of Christ's return (Matthew 25:31-46).

Throughout history there have been many events that scholars and prophecy teachers have interpreted as fulfilling some of Jesus' teaching in this chapter and therefore his return is at hand. This misses the point, for what Jesus is saying is that such events mark out the church age: wars, catastrophes, famines, etc, along with the destruction of the temple in AD70 and the evangelisation of the world, or at least the Gospel reaching all nations. The one true sign that will immediately precede his return is the cosmic sign directly from God. The rest are not birth pains but just the beginning of birth pains.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray.

#### Matthew 24:4-5

Beware that no one leads you astray. Jesus was rightly concerned about this for it has happened throughout history with many pretenders, some even performing certain signs to fool the people. This was expected and warned about: <<*The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Men like Jim Jones, the People's Temple, and David Koresh, the Branch Davidian sect, are two men who fooled hundreds of people with their deceit about the Second Coming; many of them died for no good reason in the process. According to Josephus, false

messianic figures abounded in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century as well. Seducers are of more danger to the church than persecutors and opponents could ever be.

Saying, “I am the Messiah!” Throughout the history of the church, and even today, many have made claims to messianic identity. Jesus’ disciples must be on their guard against such people. At times, God may even raise up such pretenders in order to test disciples: *<<you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul>>* (Deuteronomy 13:3).

**<sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places:**

### Matthew 24:6-7

Wars and rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes. Such cataclysmic events will be a regular part of this age until the return of Jesus to redeem all of creation. Many of these event types described occurred between Jesus’ death and AD70, with the Gospel being proclaimed among the nations to include it reaching Rome: *<<But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’>>* (Romans 10:18). Jesus used language familiar to those who knew the Scriptures: *<<They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress>>* (2 Chronicles 15:6), *<<I will stir up Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight, one against the other, neighbour against neighbour, city against city, kingdom against kingdom>>* (Isaiah 19:2), *<<Do not be faint-hearted or fearful at the rumours heard in the land – one year one rumour comes, the next year another, rumours of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler>>* (Jeremiah 51:46), and: *<<But reports from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to bring ruin and complete destruction to many>>* (Daniel 11:44).

There were a number of famines recorded shortly after Jesus’ time: *<<One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius>>* (Acts 11:28), although some of the most traumatic famines came during sieges such as that which ended in AD70, which was reminiscent of the one that had led to Babylonian exile: *<<Happier were those pierced by the sword than those pierced by hunger, whose life drains away, deprived of the produce of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people>>* (Lamentations 4:9-10).

Earthquakes had struck the region before, at least one with prophetic overtones: *<<And you shall flee by the valley of the Lord’s mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him>>* (Zechariah 14:5).

<sup>8</sup> all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

### Matthew 24:8

All this is but the beginning is language that prevents any specific historic events being identified with Jesus' overall predictions of end times' cosmic signs.

Birth pangs marks the beginning of sorrows, using the Greek *odinon*, which also means 'of travailing pains' - quick, violent, yet tedious too. This indicates that there will be a time of suffering prior to the messianic age: <<*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies*>> (Romans 8:22-23). OT prophets used the metaphor to depict terrible suffering in general: <<*Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labour. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame*>> (Isaiah 13:8b), <<*Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in labour; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear, I am dismayed so that I cannot see*>> (Isaiah 21:3), <<*For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant*>> (Isaiah 42:14), <<*Thus says the Lord: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labour? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be rescued from it*>> (Jeremiah 30:5-7), and: <<*The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for at the proper time he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb*>> (Hosea 13:13); as well as suffering that Israel will endure prior to her deliverance: <<*Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near her time, so were we because of you, O Lord; we were with child, we writhed, but we gave birth only to wind. We have won no victories on earth, and no one is born to inhabit the world. Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead*>> (Isaiah 26:17-19), <<*Before she was in labour she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labour she delivered her children. Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her – that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom*>> (Isaiah 66:7-11), <<*O inhabitant of Lebanon, nested among the cedars, how you will groan when pangs come upon you, pain as of a woman in labour!*>> (Jeremiah 22:23), and: <<*Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counsellor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labour? Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labour; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country;*

*you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies>> (Micah 4:9-10).*

### XIII.a.iii Matthew 24:9-14 - Persecutions Foretold

Jesus warns that a time of persecution awaits those who follow him, causing some to fall away from the faith. Yet for those who endure to the end there is the promise of eternal life. The Gospel will be told to all the nations of the world.

<sup>9</sup> **‘Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name.**

#### Matthew 24:9

They will hand you over is reminiscent of Jesus being given up to the Gentiles by his own people: <<*They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again’>> (Mark 10:32-34). His faithful servant Paul was treated in the same way and would become one of many to be martyred and yet was joyful in his suffering: <<*I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church>> (Colossians 1:24). In fact for Paul suffering was a way of life as he wrote just half way through his service to Christ: <<*Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked>> (2 Corinthians 11:24-27), with much more still to come!***

You will be hated by all nations. So far the opposition had been localised. Now Jesus warns that the consequences of discipleship will not end with his death nor be confined to Palestine. There would be many in the world who would grow to hate Christ and his followers. Jesus gave fair warning to all his disciples along with a stark reminder of its cause: <<*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you>> (John 15:18). They would know only too well how they treated Jesus because of that hatred.*

<sup>10</sup> **Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another.**

## Matthew 24:10

**Many will fall away.** Disciples found Jesus' teaching too difficult and had turned away: <<*Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him*>> (John 6:66). John wrote that they were not truly disciples if they left the church: <<*They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us*>> (1 John 2:19).

Another NT author provides a stark warning to those who do **fall away**: <<*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt*>> (Hebrews 6:4-6).

**They will betray one another.** Betrayal started with Judas and has continued throughout church history. Jesus had warned it would even occur within natural families: <<*From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law*'>> (Luke 12:52-53). Today, it is often represented by those who choose to gossip about others within the church family or form breakaway splinter groups because they have fallen out with other leaders of their church. Such people do not bring honour or glory to the name of Jesus, quite the opposite.

**The Lord's brother had given warning to such people:** <<*Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures*>> (James 4:1-3).

<sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.

## Matthew 24:11

**False prophets.** Deception both from the world and from within the church will be prevalent: <<*Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has*>>

*the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life. I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him>> (1 John 2:18-27), and: <<Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error>> (1 John 4:1-6). Disciples must 'test the spirits' to determine whether or not they acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, as noted in 1 John 2:22, and 1 John 4:2-3.*

<sup>12</sup> And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

### Matthew 24:12

Increase of lawlessness can indicate wickedness and certainly a lack of love. The warnings that Jesus has given to disciples then and now, is so heart wrenching in its reality that the NT writers had to warn disciples about it repeatedly: <<**Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction**>> (2 Thessalonians 2:3), <<Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth>> (1 Timothy 4:1-3), <<First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts>> (2 Peter 3:3), and: <<**Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour**>> (1 John 2:18).

The love of many will grow cold. Whether through a bad experience in church, a failure to see healing following prayer, or simply having to endure hardship in life, there have been many that have turned away from the faith because their initial love has grown cold. Jesus calls such people to remember how it was when they were first called and his view of those who do fall away: <<**But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first**>> (Revelation 2:4).

<sup>13</sup> But anyone who endures to the end will be saved.

#### Matthew 24:13

Endures to the end refers either to the end of the persecution when the Son of Man returns: <<*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes*>> (Matthew 10:23), or the end of one's life.

Will be saved. Not from physical death or human persecution (vv.21-22), but from divine wrath, in order to experience the full blessing and peace of salvation when Jesus returns.

This passage supports the view of those that say disciples who do fall away have lost their salvation. In truth, they were probably never saved to begin with.

<sup>14</sup> And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

#### Matthew 24:14

One distinct indicator that will signify the nearness of Christ's return is when this good news of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, that is, to all the nations, *ethnei* the plural of Greek *ethnos*, which means nation or people, a task that began with Jesus' command: <<*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*>> (Matthew 28:19).

However, this does not mean that every person will come to saving faith, just that the Kingdom will not come in its fullness until everyone has had the opportunity to embrace or reject the King who will be their ultimate judge. Although the world controls many of the events that people experience, the spread of the Gospel is something that is under the control of the church, even if it has historically met with opposition.

It is clear from Scripture that, although his reign will be global, Jesus will rule over a remnant only: <<*They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation*>> (Revelation 5:9), and: <<*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands*>> (Revelation 7:9), including a number of Jews: <<*Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*>> (Revelation 14:1). The world, i.e. Satan, would continue to rule over the rest: <<*The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming*>>

*his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation>> (Revelation 13:5-7), and: <<He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while>> (Revelation 20:2-3).*

As a testimony. The Gospel bears witness to Christ: <<*And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*>> (1 John 5:11), and there is no greater witness to the glory of God than his Son.

Then the end will come does not necessarily mean it will come the moment the Gospel reaches the last corner of the world, for that may already have happened, although there are no doubt some people living within cultures where access to the Gospel and its true understanding remains difficult. What Jesus appears to mean is that the Gospel must go to all the nations before he will return again.

### XIII.b Matthew 24:15-31 - The Great Tribulation and the coming of the Son of Man

Jesus moves from the general characteristics of this age to describe the great tribulation (vv.15-28), that will precede the coming of the Son of Man (vv.29-31).

#### XIII.b.i Matthew 24:15-28 - The Desolating Sacrilege

Various NT passages seem to have reapplied Daniel's image of tribulation in different ways; but all agree in warning Christians to be vigilant when they face such testing. In contrast to the false prophets who, until the end, exhorted Jerusalemites to stand firm and expect sudden deliverance, Jesus warned his followers to accept the perils of this age and escape them whenever possible.

Eusebius reports that the church in Jerusalem responded to true prophets and fled the city before its destruction came; probably Jesus' words had guided the Christian prophets to a realistic appraisal of the danger, in contrast to some other Jerusalemites. His words likewise may instruct believers facing peril today. They also remind disciples that judgments, persecution and other sufferings characterise life in this age, summoning them to yearn for their Lord's coming rather than to become complacent with this world.

<sup>15</sup> 'So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand),

#### Matthew 24:15

Daniel's remarkable end times prophecy: <<*He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator*>> (Daniel 9:27), tells of the desolating sacrilege or the abomination of desolation. Several times in

Jewish history it was thought that this prophecy was being fulfilled – most notably during the days of the Maccabees when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, ordered that an altar to the Greek god Zeus be constructed in the temple (167 BC).

He also decreed that swine and other unclean animals were to be sacrificed there, that the Sabbath was to be profaned, and that circumcision was to be abolished. This was part of Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 8:13 and 11:31-39. But Jesus clarifies that the complete fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel 9:27 will be found in:

1. The Roman destruction of the temple in AD70, and the desolation of the Jewish nation as a result.
2. The image of the Antichrist being set up in the last days: <<*He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:4), <<*and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived*>> (Revelation 13:14).

Let the reader understand. There are many that took this prophecy to refer to the time of tribulation and the great desecration of the temple that occurred during the war of AD66-70, which appeared to be accompanied by cosmic signs. Indeed, Halley’s Comet would have been most clearly visible during March when the war started and Josephus records monumental thunder and lightning storms as the Jews first overthrew the Romans in Jerusalem. However, Jesus indicates that this to be just a sign of the tribulation to come that will accompany his return.



Halley’s Comet - a cosmic sign!

<sup>16</sup> then those in Judæa must flee to the mountains;

#### Matthew 24:16

Flee to the mountains. The ancient church historian Eusebius reports that, during the Jewish revolt (AD66-70), when the Romans surrounded the city, Jesus’ warning was fulfilled when Christians fled to the mountains of Pella (Ecclesiastical History 3.5.3), and the Romans did not inhibit them. David too had fled to this region: <<*David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but the Lord did not give him into his hand*>> (1 Samuel 23:14).

Josephus records that as many as two million people from several nations may have died as a result of this tragic conflict and yet not one Christian died in Jerusalem for they all departed before the siege took hold.

<sup>17</sup> someone on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; <sup>18</sup> someone in the field must not turn back to get a coat.

#### Matthew 24:17-18

Someone on the housetop must not go down. Houses in Palestine had flat roofs that were used for storage and indeed a cool place to sleep at night. Peter used it as a place to pray: <<*About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray*>> (Acts 10:9). Because outside staircases led up to the flat rooftops, a person could descend without entering the house to retrieve possessions. People normally slept in their outer garments and wore them during the cold of early morning labour in the fields, and then they would leave them at the edge of the field as the day grew warmer. As essential as this outer cloak was, Jesus declares that running away at the news of impending destruction was of greater importance. Therefore, there will be no time to gather provisions or even to get a coat for warmth. Similarly, Lot and his family were encouraged to leave Sodom with great urgency: <<*Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.*' Therefore the city was called Zoar>> (Genesis 19:22).

<sup>19</sup> Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! <sup>20</sup> Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

#### Matthew 24:19-20

The woe over the pregnant and nursing mothers signifies the difficulty of flight and survival: <<*For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed"*>> (Luke 23:29), implying the great sorrow of losing children in the trauma. One hapless victim in such a flight was King Saul's grandson: <<*Saul's son Jonathan had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled; and, in her haste to flee, it happened that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth*>> (2 Samuel 4:4).

May not be in winter or on a Sabbath. They should pray that the harshest conditions and most revered traditions would not be a hindrance to fleeing. Paul had advised Timothy to come to Rome while travel was still favourable: <<*Do your best to come before winter*>> (2 Timothy 4:21a), a warning that he would no doubt heed unlike others that Paul had warned: <<*Since much time had been lost and sailing was now dangerous, because even the Fast had already gone by, Paul advised them, saying, 'Sirs, I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives'*>> (Acts 27:9-10).

<sup>21</sup> For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

## Matthew 24:21

Great suffering or tribulation refers to the time of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 which was truly terrible, but the vision Jesus paints will have an even more horrific fulfilment in the future, i.e. such as has not been: <<And because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again>> (Ezekiel 5:9), <<At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book>> (Daniel 12:1), and: <<Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come>> (Joel 2:1-2).

<sup>22</sup> And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

## Matthew 24:22

If those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. Some suggest this means that, if God's wrath were to continue unchecked against the wickedness of humanity, no one would survive the eventual destruction. Others see in this a reference to a cutting short of either the seventieth week: <<Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed>> (Daniel 9:24-26), or the 42 months of: <<but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months>> (Revelation 11:2). It is evident that the reference is not to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, since the unprecedented destruction described in v.21 did not take place in AD70. The elect includes all those who follow Christ during this period as noted in v.24 and v.31.

<sup>23</sup> Then if anyone says to you, "Look! Here is the Messiah!" or "There he is!" – do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

### Matthew 24:23-24

Great signs and omens or wonders are the supernatural signs and miracles that have the appearance of coming from God but that will actually be the work of Satan and his evil forces.

On testing false prophets, refer to comments made on Matthew 7:15-20, Matthew 9:34 and 1 John 4:1.

**<sup>25</sup> Take note, I have told you beforehand. <sup>26</sup> So, if they say to you, “Look! He is in the wilderness”, do not go out. If they say, “Look! He is in the inner rooms”, do not believe it. <sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.**

### Matthew 24:25-27

Look, he is in the wilderness, Look! He is in the inner rooms. The Messiah will not come secretly to a select group and stay hidden from public view. Rather, he will appear like a flash of lightning: <<*Under the whole heaven he lets it loose, and his lightning to the corners of the earth*>> (Job 37:3), and: <<*His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles*>> (Psalm 97:4), sudden and visible to all on the earth. It should never be forgotten that God is omnipresent.

**<sup>28</sup> Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.**

### Matthew 24:28

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. It seems best not to over-interpret this striking proverbial expression. It probably means simply that, just as people from far away can see vultures circling high in the air, Christ's return in judgment will be visible and predictable. A similar view is that the vultures suggest the widespread death that will accompany the return of Christ to judge those who have rejected his Kingdom. In either case, it will be impossible for people not to see and recognise the return of Christ.

### XIII.b.ii Matthew 24:29-31 - The Coming of the Son of Man

Jesus switches from an impending period of great tribulation to one that is more distance and will be final. For his *Parousia* or return in great glory will mark the end of all other tribulations. However, like the Day of the Lord in the OT: <<*Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light*>> (Amos 5:18), it will not be good news for everyone.

**<sup>29</sup> ‘Immediately after the suffering 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 heaven will be shaken.**

## Matthew 24:29

Immediately after the suffering of those days ties the tribulation of those days to the unidentified final tribulation, a tribulation that can be clearly identified as the final one only by the fact that Jesus' return concludes it. In a similar way, their antediluvian ancestor Enoch had seen the Second Coming of Christ as if it were linked to his own time in history, reporting it in the present tense: <<*It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'See, the Lord is coming with tens of thousands of his holy ones'*>> (Jude 14), and seen at a distance by Balaam: <<*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel*>> (Numbers 24:17a).

Although God lives outside of the constraints of time, Jesus uses language that would be familiar to his listeners and yet could be confusing because they are time-bound. Peter was able to see beyond such limitations with his own explanation: <<*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*>> (2 Peter 3:8). However, Jesus may also have been referring to the tribulation of the church age, which would be continuous until his return.

The sun, the moon, the stars, and the powers. It is possible that this is entirely literal language with stars perhaps referring to a large meteor shower, appearing to fall from heaven. If the sun will be darkened supernaturally then the moon, which is but a reflection of the sun, could not give its light. Other commentators take it as a mixture of literal and figurative language, and still others take it as entirely figurative, pointing to political judgment on nations and governments. Some see these elements as the temple, Jerusalem, the cities of Judæa and the Roman army, all relating to AD70 but most accept they represent an indication of a time yet to come.

The argument in favour of a figurative interpretation is that this verse echoes possibly figurative language about heavenly disturbances in the OT prophets, such as: <<*For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light*>> (Isaiah 13:10), <<*All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree*>> (Isaiah 34:4), <<*When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light*>> (Ezekiel 32:7), <<*The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining*>> (Joel 2:10), and: <<*On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight*>> (Amos 8:9), an event that occurred literally at the time of Jesus' death.

Those arguing for a literal interpretation point to biblical accounts of actual darkness: <<*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand towards heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.'* So Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see

one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived>> (Exodus 10:21-23), and: <<From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon>> (Matthew 27:45).

The idea of the stars falling and the heavens being rolled up is mentioned elsewhere in the NT as well: <<like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end>> (Hebrews 1:12), <<But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless. But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?>> (2 Peter 3:7-12), <<and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place>> (Revelation 6:13-14).

Whether these events are to be understood as being primarily literal or primarily figurative, it is clear that these will be earth-shattering events, through which all creation will be radically transformed at the return of Christ.

The establishment of 'new heavens and the new earth' is also recorded elsewhere: <<For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind>> (Isaiah 65:17), <<But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home>> (2 Peter 3:13), and: <<Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more>> (Revelation 21:1).

<sup>30</sup> 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.

#### Matthew 24:30

The sign of the Son of Man. Some suggest that this is a type of heavenly standard or banner that unfurls in the heavens as Christ returns in power and great glory, while others understand it to be the arrival of the Son of Man himself as the sign of the end-time consummation of the age: <<For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done>> (Matthew 16:27), and: <<Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'>> (Matthew 26:64).

All the tribes of the earth will mourn refers either to a sorrow that produces repentance, or a great sadness of regret in light of the coming judgment.

They will see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven”. This most clearly is end-time language that recalls Daniel’s prophecy: *<<As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed>>* (Daniel 7:13-14), and points to Jesus’ return at the end of the age: *<<and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed>>* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10), and: *<<Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’>>* (Revelation 19:11-16).

The Son of man is Jesus’ favourite self-designation. Refer to the comments made on Matthew 8:20.

With power and great glory. Christ will be revealed as the eternal ruler of the Kingdom of God: *<<Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him>>* (Psalm 50:3), and: *<<The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden>>* (Habakkuk 3:4), designated by the Ancient of Days to receive worship and to exercise dominion over the earth and all of its inhabitants as recently noted in Daniel 7:13-14. The return of Christ will be a literal event, in which, according to the angels, Christ: *<<will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven>>* (Acts 1:11b), something revealed to John: *<<Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail>>* (Revelation 1:7).

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

## Matthew 24:31

A loud trumpet call is associated with Jewish end-time thought: <<*All you inhabitants of the world, you who live on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, listen!*>> (Isaiah 18:3), <<*And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem*>> (Isaiah 27:13), <<*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near*>> (Joel 2:1), and: <<*a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements*>> (Zephaniah 1:16). It appears also in Christian writings: <<*Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*>> (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), and: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16). It is associated with the appearance of the Messiah coming to claim his rightful inheritance.

The sound of the trumpet had caused fear in the past: <<*On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled*>> (Exodus 19:16), and announced great joy to herald in the Year of Jubilee: <<*You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month – on the day of atonement – you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family*>> (Leviticus 25:8-10). Once again, there will be a mixture of great joy and fear at the Lord's return.

His angels will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. The involvement of angels probably indicates that, when Jesus returns, he will not only gather to himself all believers alive on the earth but will also bring with him all the redeemed who are in heaven: <<*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

His elect will be relatively few compared to all those that were initially called but did not respond to their calling. Jesus will have those gathered that he considers to have been faithful to their calling: <<*Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!*>> (Psalm 50:5), although this does not imply any good works or special abilities on their part, other than they gave their hearts and lives by faith over to the service of their Lord and Saviour.

### XIII.c Matthew 24:32-44 - The nearness and time of Jesus' coming

Jesus moves from describing future events to dealing with the attitudes that should characterise his followers as they prepare for the end (vv.32-35), knowing that his return is imminent (vv.36-41). However, the Son of Man will return at an unknown hour so disciples are called to be ever watchful (vv.42-44).

Many popular prophecy teachers have created an end-time scenario very different from, and far more complex than, the one taught by Jesus. At the same time, they have rightly reminded many in the body of Christ that they should always be ready for Christ's unexpected return.

#### XIII.c.i Matthew 24:32-35 - The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Jesus used a well known analogy from nature to show that, just as a growing plant indicates the coming season, so too the signs given will announce the impending arrival of the Son of Man.

<sup>32</sup> **'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.**  
<sup>33</sup> **So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.** <sup>34</sup> **Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.**

#### Matthew 24:32-34

Learn its lesson is a clear command to heed what the Lord would now teach. Although the Ficus genus is mainly an evergreen, the fig tree, i.e. the Common Fig that grew at higher elevations and in temperate climates such as found around Jerusalem, was one of the few deciduous plants in Judæa so that, when it puts forth leaves, the season for figs is approaching. It is the same as with the signs that Jesus has indicated the Second Coming can be identified by. For when God begins to fulfil prophecies, he will make an end. In a parallel passage this is made even more explicit: <<*So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near*>> (Luke 21:31).

This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Several interpretations have been offered for this difficult passage:

1. Some think this generation refers to the disciples who were alive when Jesus was speaking, and all these things refers to the beginning but not the completion of the sufferings described in vv.4-25.
2. Others see in all these things a prediction with multiple fulfilments, so that Jesus' disciples will be both this generation that sees the destruction of the temple in AD70 and also those at the end of the age who see the events surrounding: <<*the desolating sacrilege*>> (v.15).
3. Since 'the generation of' in the OT can mean people who have a certain quality, such as: <<*There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous*>> (Psalm 14:5), and: <<*Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob*>> (Psalm 24:6), using the Greek *genea* as in: <<*And his master*

*commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light>> (Luke 16:8), others understand this generation to refer to either:*

- a. *'This generation of believers' throughout the entire present age.*
  - b. *'This evil generation' that will remain until Christ returns to establish his Kingdom: <<*Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So will it be also with this evil generation*>> (Matthew 12:45), and: <<*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah*>> (Luke 11:29).*
4. Others, particularly some dispensational interpreters, understand generation to mean race, which is another sense of Greek *genea*, and think it refers to the Jewish people, who will not pass away until Christ returns.
  5. Others understand this generation to mean the generation that sees all these things, namely, the generation alive when the final period of great tribulation begins. According to this view, the illustration of the fig tree shows that when the final events begin, Christ will come soon. Just as all these things in v.33 refers to events leading up to but not including Christ's return, so in v.34 all these things refers to the same events, that is, the events described in vv.4-25.

<sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

#### Matthew 24:35

Heaven and earth will pass away is something spoken of frequently in Scripture: <<*Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away*>> (Psalm 102:25-26), but the Kingdom would endure for all time: <<*For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures for ever.'* That word is the good news that was announced to you>> (1 Peter 1:24-25); that is, my words will not pass away. Jesus attributes divine authority and permanence to his own teaching – it is greater even than heaven and earth.

#### XIII.c.ii Matthew 24:36-44 - The Necessity for Watchfulness

The predictions of the events that shall precede the Second Coming are detailed and will come to pass. However, no one knows when they will occur and human nature has a tendency to become complacent as time passes. Jesus warns on the need to be ever watchful so that the signs will not be missed and that people will not be caught unaware when they come to pass.

<sup>36</sup> ‘But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

#### Matthew 24:36

In response to the disciples asking: <<*when will this be?*>> (v.3), Jesus says no one knows, not even the Son, but only the Father. In his incarnate life, Jesus learned things as other human beings learn them: <<*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour*>> (Luke 2:52), and: <<*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered*>> (Hebrews 5:8). On the other hand, Jesus was also fully God, and, as God, he had infinite knowledge: <<*and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone*>> (John 2:25), <<*Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God*>> (John 16:30), and: <<*He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’*>> (John 21:17). Here, he is apparently speaking in terms of his human nature. This is similar to other statements about Jesus which could be true of his human nature only, and not of his divine nature: <<*And the child grew and became strong*>> (Luke 2:40a), <<*was about thirty years old*>> (Luke 3:23a), <<*tired as he was*>> (John 4:6b), <<*Jesus began to weep*>> (John 11:35), <<*I am thirsty*>> (John 19:28b), and: <<*crucified*>> (1 Corinthians 2:8b).

Taking account of these verses, together with many verses that affirm Christ’s deity, the Council of Chalcedon in AD451 affirmed that Christ was ‘perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man’. Yet it also affirmed that Jesus was ‘one Person and one Subsistence’. With regard to the properties of his human nature and his divine nature, the Chalcedonian Creed affirmed that Christ was to be ‘acknowledged in two natures, in-confusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved’. That meant the properties of deity and the properties of humanity were both preserved. How Jesus could have limited knowledge and yet know all things is difficult, and much remains a mystery, for nobody else has ever been both God and man. One possibility is that Jesus regularly lived on the basis of his human knowledge but could at any time call to mind anything from his infinite knowledge.

<sup>37</sup> For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

#### Matthew 24:37-39

They knew nothing until the flood came. Despite the lengthy warnings given by Noah and the preparations he made to escape the flood, the people failed to heed

the warnings or to make any attempt at reconciliation with God. Then the water came: *<<For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground'>>* (Genesis 7:4), and it is fitting that judgement came from the clouds for so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Luke, who records this teaching thematically prior to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, records that Jesus also cites the example of Lot escaping from Sodom with the inhabitants of the city unaware of the devastation to come: *<<Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed all of them – it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed>>* (Luke 17:28-30).

<sup>40</sup> Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

#### Matthew 24:40-41

One will be taken and one will be left. The description may indicate that one is taken away to final judgment (v.39), while the other remains to experience salvation at Christ's return. This would fit with the idea of the majority being taken in Noah's flood to judgement, and is supported by: *<<But I am full of the wrath of the Lord; I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, and on the gatherings of young men as well; both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged>>* (Jeremiah 6:11). However, most commentators understand that the one who is taken is among those chosen and that the Son of Man: *<<will gather his elect from the four winds>>* (v.31). The elect may be spared from witnessing God's wrath: *<<Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath>>* (Zephaniah 2:3).

<sup>42</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

#### Matthew 24:42

Keep awake. Christians should not merely keep looking for the coming of the Son of Man. Instead they should be completing the work of the Great Commission, as well as being prepared and expectant, because the time of Christ's return is unknown (v.36). Jesus will repeat this instruction to ensure his message has been received: *<<Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour>>* (Matthew 25:13). Paul reiterates the Lord's call for watchfulness: *<<So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober>>* (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

To watch implies not only to believe that the Lord will come, but to desire that he would come, to be often thinking of his coming, always looking for it as sure and near, even if the timing of it remains uncertain. To watch for Christ's coming is to maintain that gracious attitude and disposition of mind which

disciples should be willing that their Lord, when he comes, should find them in. To watch is to be aware of the first signs of his approach, that they may immediately attend to him, addressing themselves to the duty of welcoming him. Watching, i.e. watchmen, is associated with the night, which is normally a time for sleeping; while disciples are in this world, it is night time for them, and they must remain awake at all cost.

For you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. That the time of Jesus' coming is unknown does not preclude that some signs mentioned earlier in the passage will precede it. However, the signs themselves do not mean that his return will immediately follow; just that they indicate that he is preparing to come.

<sup>43</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

#### Matthew 24:43-44

If the owner of the house had known, he would have stayed awake. The early Christians often reused Jesus' image of a householder unprepared for a nocturnal thief: <<*They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief*>> (Joel 2:9), for Jesus' return at the end: <<*For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4), <<*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed*>> (2 Peter 3:10), and: <<*'See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame'*>> (Revelation 16:15).

#### XIII.d Matthew 24:45-25:30 - Parabolic exhortations to watch and be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man

Jesus gave five parables to explain to his disciples how and why they should be prepared for his coming: the homeowner and the thief as noted in vv.42-44, the good and wicked servants (vv.45-51), the ten bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13), and the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

Jesus concluded this final discourse with the Judgement of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46), that shows there will be a final sorting of people into those who are led into the eternal presence of God and those that will be cast into hell for eternal punishment.

### XIII.d.i Matthew 24:45-51 - The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave

After Jesus had exhorted the disciples to stay awake, he then illustrated what he meant. Disciples stay alert not by artificially and perpetually stirring expectation that he will come at a given hour, but by living in such a manner that they would have no cause for shame if he did come at any time, since he may in fact do so.

<sup>45</sup> **‘Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?’**

#### Matthew 24:45

The faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household. This closing parable offers sound advice and warning to all disciples but since this man is a steward in the house it alludes to those called to serve in church leadership. Therefore, allowance of food at the proper time most likely refers to the teaching and guidance that a leader is expected to provide to others in the church. Paul acknowledges the core value of their calling: *<<Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy>>* (1 Corinthians 4:2). Being faithful both to God and his people is of greater importance than their knowledge or wisdom. It is a quality attributed to the Lord himself: *<<Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also ‘was faithful in all God’s house’>>* (Hebrews 3:1-2), therefore, it is worthy of emulation.

<sup>46</sup> **Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.** <sup>47</sup> **Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.**

#### Matthew 24:46-47

Blessed is that slave. Those who do persevere to the end and live their lives for Christ, in his service through the local church or in their communities, will be rewarded with eternal life when Christ returns: *<<His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master”>>* (Matthew 25:21), i.e. he will put that one in charge of all his possessions.

Will find at work when he arrives does not imply salvation is achieved through good works. However, Jesus will expect his stewards and disciples to be actively engaged in Kingdom work when he arrives.

<sup>48</sup> **But if that wicked slave says to himself, “My master is delayed”,**  
<sup>49</sup> **and he begins to beat his fellow-slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards,** <sup>50</sup> **the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know.** <sup>51</sup> **He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

## Matthew 24:48-51

Delayed. The behaviour of the wicked slave indicates that he is a false disciple and certainly not worthy to be called a church leader: <<**Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**>> (Galatians 5:19-21), and is deserving of that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a description of hell. Refer to comments made on Matthew 8:11-12.

He begins to beat his fellow-slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards. Such appalling behaviour would be condemned in any person, would not be expected of a true disciple and clearly is intolerable for one who is called to be a steward of God's house - the church.

He will cut him in pieces is the Greek *dikotomesei auton*, which could be used to mean 'he shall cut him off from the land of the living'. This is linked to the curses found in the law: <<**The Lord will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law**>> (Deuteronomy 29:21). It is read by some to be a separation of body and soul. One sent to the grave to rot and the other condemned to the fires of hell - the king of terrors: <<**They are torn from the tent in which they trusted, and are brought to the king of terrors**>> (Job 18:14). The wicked servant divided himself between God and the world, Christ and Beelzebul, his calling and his ambition; justly therefore will he be divided too.

Jesus had spoken out often against the establishment of the Jewish church throughout his ministry. Although what Jesus is warning here can and should rightly be applied to all who profess to be believers but are not living a truly Christian life, it should especially be taken as a warning against church leaders who have neglected their primary duty of caring for and raising up the flock: <<**You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them**>> (Ezekiel 34:4).

At an hour he does not know. It seems that, since the time of return is unknown, this steward has fallen into the same trap as many do who think that perhaps he is not coming at all, or at least his own misdemeanours will be overlooked when the time comes: <<**Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil**>> (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Jesus has said: <<**Surely I am coming soon**>> (Revelation 22:20b). 'Surely I am coming' requires all disciples to expect his return; 'I am coming soon' requires all disciples to be always expecting him!