

Matthew 24

This sermon is likely given on the Tuesday before the crucifixion; see the chart presented at the beginning of chapter 21. Matthew 24 has been one of the most debated chapters in the whole Bible. At first glance, Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. At the end of the previous chapter, Jesus had warned His Jewish audience that upon them would fall the blood of all the prophets and righteous men who had lived before their time and during their time (23:34-36). There would be a great day of reckoning on Jerusalem and its people, Israel. Jesus desired to gather them together into His kingdom but they did not share the same desire; thus their “house” would be left desolate (23:37-39). Herod the Great began renovating the temple in 20 or 19 B. C. The temple was still under construction / renovation at that time (John 2:20) and would be finished about four years before the Romans will destroy it (see “Archaeology” under the section for 24:32-35).

Yet, in 24:35, Jesus clearly refers to the destruction of the world. From that point through chapter 25, Jesus seems to be anticipating the final destruction of the world. Students of the Bible and scholars have, therefore, argued about the point where Jesus ends His discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem and where He begins His discussion of the destruction of the world. Some believe Jesus mixes the two discussions. One aspect that makes the study most challenging is that Jesus incorporates language similar to that language used in the book of Revelation, from which the language gets its name: *apocalyptic*. “Apocalyptic” derives from the word for “Revelation.” Clearly the word conveys the idea of a *revealing* but Revelation was written utilizing *symbols* to convey *ideas*. Symbols are used to convey certain ideas but, by their nature, they are also flexible so that they might convey more than one idea. Therefore, the “coming of the Son of Man” (24:3) might refer to a physical coming in person or a coming in judgment through some other means. The Bible student has to make a determination, based on the context. That is the challenge before us as we seek to interpret this text properly.

The key passage which refers to the “coming of the Son of Man” is Daniel 7:13-14, a passage which has had a heavy influence on the Gospel of Matthew to this point as it relates to the Messiah who receives His kingdom. See Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 26:64.

TRANSLATION - 24:1-2:

1 And after going out, Jesus, from the temple, He was going out, and His disciples approached to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. **2** And after answering He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will not at all be left here a stone on a stone which will not be detached.

GREEK WORDS:

The word “temple” (ver. 1) was first seen at 4:5; see comments there. After this text, the temple will not be mentioned again except at 26:55. “Disciple” was first seen at 5:1. “To show” or “to point out” is used only 7 times in the NT; it was used at 16:1 and 22:19. This is the only time “buildings” is used in Matthew; it is used in the NT 18 times. “To see” (ver. 2) is used 132 times; it was used first in Matthew at 5:28. “To leave” was first seen at 3:15. It is used frequently in the gospel, 47 times. “To throw down” or “to detach” was used at 5:17 relative to the Law. It will be used again at 26:61 and 27:40.

PARALLELS:

These first few verses have their parallel in Mark’s account (13:1-2) and Luke’s (21:5-6).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Jeremiah (7:12-14; 9:11; 22:1-5; 26:6, 18) and Micah (3:12) predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which happened around 586 B. C.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The Jewish historian, Josephus, gives an early description of the destruction of his capital city in his book *Wars*, books 4, 5, and 6. He lived during that time period. When the temple was set on fire (see below under “Archaeology” at 24:32-35), stones from the temple were pried apart to collect the gold that had flowed there from the temple being set on fire.

COMMENTS:

Jesus has just alluded to the destruction of the Jews’ “house” (23:38). While the “house” might have referred to the nation of Israel or its capital, Jerusalem, here it clearly refers to the temple. As Jesus was leaving Jerusalem, His disciples were meditating on that prediction. The temple was built under the command of Jehovah God, under King Solomon, and He chose to put His name there (1 Kings 7-8). The temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36) and then rebuilt (the story is told in Ezra). It was again defiled under Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the Greek, and rebuilt under King Herod. The apostles were likely wondering why God would destroy the temple again, how He would destroy it, and when. But, it will be destroyed; Jesus left no doubt about that.

APPLICATION:

The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem will reappear in the trial of Jesus (26:61) and be referenced at His crucifixion (27:40). It will also be referenced in the accusation against Stephen in Acts 6:14.

TRANSLATION - 24:3-14:

3 And sitting on the Mount of Olives, there came to Him the disciples alone, saying, ‘Tell to us when these things will be and what the sign of your coming and the completion of the age?’ **4** And after answering, Jesus said to them, “See not any of you may be deceived. **5** For many will come in My name saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will deceive many. **6** And you all are about to hear of wars and rumors of wars; pay attention; do not be alarmed; for it is necessary to happen, but not yet is the end. **7** For nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom and there will be famine and earthquakes in every place. **8** And all these things [are] the beginning of birth pains. **9** At that time, they will deliver you unto tribulation and they will kill you, and you will be being hated by all the nations on account of My name. **10** And at that time many will be offended and others will be handed over and they will hate others; **11** And many false prophets will rise up and will deceive many. **12** And on account of multiplying lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. **13** And the one enduring to the end will be saved. **14** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the habitations for a testimony to all the nations, even at that time the end will come.

GREEK WORDS:

“Olives” (ver. 3) is found first at 21:1. The word is used in the NT 15 times. “Sign” was used first at 12:38-39. Matthew uses the word 13 times. “Coming” is an important word in the NT since it often refers to Jesus’ coming at the end of time. However, we caution against assuming every occurrence of its use relative to Jesus refers to His second coming. It referred in secular Greek to the arrival of a king. The word is used 24 times in the NT; in Matthew, at 24:3, 27, 37, 39. It will not be used again until 1 Corinthians. It can also mean “presence” or “arrival.” “To complete” is used only 6 times in the NT: Matthew 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Heb. 9:26. “Age” was used first at 12:32. It is used 8 times by Matthew. It refers to a period of time and does not *inherently* refer to time itself.

“To deceive” (ver. 4) is used 39 times in the NT, in Matthew first at 18:12-13. “Name” is used 230 times in the NT. It is used first at 1:21. “War” (ver. 6) is found 18 times in the NT; this is its only use in Matthew. “To pay attention” or “to see to it” is used first at 5:8. “To be troubled” or “to be alarmed” is used three times: Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; 2 Thess. 2:2. “It is

necessary” is found 101 times; in Matthew first at 16:21. “End” or “completion” is found first at 10:22, out of 40 uses.

“To rise up” (ver. 7) is often used for the resurrection. The verb was found first at 1:24. “Nation” was used first at 4:15. “Kingdom” was used first at 3:2. “Famine” or “hunger” is found only here in Matthew (24:7); it is used 12 times in the NT. “Earthquake” was used first at 8:24. It will be used again at 27:54 and 28:2. The word is used 14 times in the NT. “Beginning” (ver. 8) is used 55 times in the NT, first at 19:4, 8. “Birth pains” is used 4 times: Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8; Acts 2:24; 1 Thess. 5:3.

“To deliver up or over” (ver. 9) is used 119 times in the NT, first at 4:12. “Tribulation” is used first at 13:21. It will be used here at 24:9, 21, 29. “To kill” was used first at 10:28. “To hate” is used first at 5:43. “Nation” was used above at verse 7; “name” was used at verse 4. “To offend” (ver. 10) was first used at 5:29-30. “To hand over” was used at verse 9. “To hate” was also used at verse 9. “False prophet” (ver. 11) was used first at 7:15. The word is used in Matthew again only here at 24:11, 24. “To raise up” was used at verse 7.

“To increase” or “to multiply” (ver. 12) is used 12 times in the NT; this is its only use in Matthew. “Lawlessness” was used first at 7:23. “To grow cold” is only used here in the NT. This is the only time the noun “love” (*agape*) is found in Matthew. “To endure” (ver. 13) is used 17 times in the NT; it was used first in 10:22. “To save” was used first at 1:21. It is used 106 times in the NT. “To preach” (ver. 14) was used first at 3:1. The verb is used 61 times in the NT. “Gospel” is used 76 times in the NT, first at 4:23. “Habitations” is found only here in Matthew, out of 15 times in the NT. “Testimony” was used first at 8:4. “Nations” was used in verse 7. “End” was used at verse 6.

PARALLELS:

This paragraph is found also at Mark 13:3-13 and Luke 21:7-19. Mark tells us that only Peter, Andrew, James, and John (13:3) are present for this discussion.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Verses 6-7 contain allusions to Isaiah 19:2 and 2 Chronicles 15:6. Isaiah 19:2 is particularly relevant to this context because 19:1 refers to the Lord “coming” on a swift cloud in judgment against the nation of Egypt. For the same idea, see Isaiah 3:14; 10:26-28; 13:9; 31:1-2; 35:4; 40:10; 59:19-20.

Verse 8, with its allusion to birth pains, may have come from Isaiah 13:8; 26:16-19; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; Micah 4:9-10.

One note we should make on the word “parousia...” The word is translated “coming” and is used 24 times in the NT. It can be translated “presence.” It should *not* always be understood to refer to the second coming of Christ. For its use, see Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6-7; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8-9; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. The word is not found in the Greek translation of the OT, but it is found in books in the Septuagint which are not found in the OT. It is so used four times: Judith 10:18; 2 Maccabees 8:12; 15:21; 3 Maccabees 3:17.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 70), there were notable earthquakes in: Antioch (A. D. 37), Phrygia (A. D. 53), Asia (A. D. 61), the Lycus Valley (A. D. 61), as well as in Jerusalem (A. D. 67). There were also many famines, one notably predicted by the Christian prophet Agabus in Acts 11:28.

COMMENTS:

From the Mount of Olives, Jesus and His apostles would have a wide view of the city of Jerusalem with its marvelous temple dedicated to Jehovah God. There, the apostles ask Jesus privately to give them more details about the destruction of Jerusalem. While the apostles seem to be asking three questions, we don’t believe the apostles intended to distinguish the

three events mentioned. The questions are: 1) When will these things happen? 2) What will be the sign of Your coming? 3) What will be the sign of the end of the age?

Clearly question #1 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. Would the apostles have in mind Jesus' second coming at questions #2 and #3? They did not grasp Jesus' prophecy about His resurrection (16:21-23); it is likely they have in mind a coming in judgment which we see extensively in Isaiah (see above under "Old Testament References"). Jesus has pictured a judgment coming on Jerusalem in the two prior paragraphs: 23:34-36; 23:37-39. In the same way the "end of the age" is likely a third way of referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar led to a new "age" of exile in Babylon. The destruction of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes led to a new "age" of servitude under antagonistic rulers. Therefore, in its context, we do not believe the apostles have three, or two, different events in mind but, rather, are looking at a singular event from different perspectives.

In verse 4, Jesus begins answering their question. He warns that His disciples can be misled and should not be. Some will claim to be the Messiah, returning in judgment (ver. 5). The apostles will hear of wars, which will motivate them to desire a new "Prince of Peace" or the return (in person) of the "Prince of Peace." Jesus warns them not to be frightened and not to be led away. The "end" of Jerusalem will not happen at that point (ver. 6). Nations and kingdoms will fight each other. Famines and earthquakes will also happen. All of these catastrophes can cause people to look for leaders ("Messiahs") to calm their hearts and explain these events in a theological context. If there is such a desire, there will always be charlatans who will step into and fulfill those expectations. But Jesus does not want His followers to be deceived.

Those events will only be the "beginning of birth pains" (ver. 8). The worst is yet to come. His followers will be delivered to tribulation, which is a general term to describe difficult times including persecution. In fact, some of His followers will be killed and will be hated by all nations, due to their intense devotion to Jesus of Nazareth (ver. 9; 10:17-22). But the difficult times will motivate many to turn away from Christ. They will fall away; they will betray fellow disciples and hate fellow Christians.

In verse 11, Jesus promises that false teachers / false prophets will make themselves known and they will mislead many. As Christians are led away from Christ, lawlessness will increase and the passion Christians have had for the Truth will grow cold. But faithfulness is absolutely necessary; the one who endures to the end and remains faithful to Christ, will be saved (see Luke 18:8).

APPLICATION:

For passages referring to the Lord's second coming, see 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 1:16. The NT also warns against false teachers: Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1; 2 Cor. 11:3-15. Paul states that the Gospel was preached in the whole, known world by the time he wrote Colossians 1:23. See also 1 Thess. 1:8; Rom. 1:5, 8; 15:19; Col. 1:6.

The church also must still contend with false teachers: Gal. 2:1-4; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 19-20; 2 Tim. 3:8-9; Titus 1:10-11; Jude; 2 Peter 2. The false doctrine might not refer to the second coming, but if it is against what Jesus or His apostles taught, then it is false. There are references in Acts to false Messiahs: 5:36-37; 21:38.

We have seen the prophecy of persecution against Christians already in Matthew. It is a theme that shows up in the NT in other places: 5:10; 10:16-42; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-19. There is no reason to believe, as some do, that there will be a great "tribulation" still to come. When one considers every passage where the word is found, there is no reference to a "great" tribulation that will occur before the final destruction of the world.

Matthew's gospel has illustrated the love Jesus has for non-Jews (Gentiles) which culminates in His command for His followers to take His message to the world (28:19). There were Gentile women in His genealogy (1:3, 5-6) and the wisemen came from the east to worship Him (2:1-12). Also, the Roman centurion expressed an extraordinary faith in Jesus (8:5-13). See also 8:28-34; 15:21-39.

TRANSLATION - 24:15-28:

15 Therefore whenever you may see the abomination of desolation spoken through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, the one reading let him understand, **16** At that time, those in Judea let them flee into the mountains; **17** the one on the roof, let him not come down to take that from his house, **18** And the one in the field, let him not return behind to take his cloak. **19** And woe to those having in the womb and those nursing in those days. **20** And pray that your flight will not be in the winter nor on the sabbath. **21** For it will be at that time a great tribulation which has not been from the beginning of the world until now nor will it ever be. **22** And unless those days had been shortened, not any flesh would be saved. And on account of the elect, those days will be shortened. **23** At that time, if any may say to you, 'Behold here [is] the Christ, or, There!' do not believe. **24** For they will rise up false Christs and false prophets and they will give great signs and wonders in order to deceive, if possible, even the elect. **25** Behold I have told you before. **26** Therefore if I they may say to you, 'Behold in the desert He is,' do not go out. 'Behold in the inner room [He is]', do not believe. **27** For just as the lightning goes out from the east and shines until the west, thus it will be the appearance of the Son of Man; **28** if wherever may be the corpse, there will be gathered together the eagles.

GREEK WORDS:

"Abomination" (ver. 15) is found 6 times in the NT: Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 16:15; Rev. 17:4-5; 21:27. "Desolation" is used three times in the NT: Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20. "Daniel" is only found here in the gospel of Matthew. "Holy" was first used in 1:18. "To read" was first used at 12:3, 5. "To understand" was used first at 15:17. "To flee" (ver. 16) was first used at 2:13. "Roof" (ver. 17) is used 7 times in the NT, first in 10:27.

"Field" (ver. 18) is used 36 times in the NT, for the first time at 6:28, 30. "To return" or "to turn back" is used 36 times in the NT, first in Matthew at 10:13. "Cloak" is used 60 times in the NT; it is used first at 5:40. "Womb" (ver. 19) is used first at 1:18 (see also 1:23; 24:19 in Matthew), out of 9 uses. The verb "to nurse" is used 5 times in the NT: Matt. 21:16; 24:19; Mark 13:17; Luke 11:27; 21:23. "To pray" is used 85 times in the NT; it was used first in Matthew at 5:44. "Flight," related to the verb "to flee" used earlier, is used only here in the NT. "Winter" is used 6 times in the NT: Matt. 16:3; 24:20; Mark 13:18; John 10:22; Acts 27:20; 2 Tim. 4:21. "Sabbath" is used 68 times, first in Matthew at 12:1, 2, 5, 8, 10-12.

"Tribulation" (ver. 21) was used at verse 9. "To shorten" (ver. 22) is used only in this context and in its parallel in Mark (13:20). "Flesh" is used 147 times in the NT, first in Matthew 16:17. "Elect" is used 22 times, first at 22:14. It is used in this context at: 24:22, 24, 31. "To believe" (ver. 23) is used 241 times in the NT, used first at 8:13. "To raise up" (ver. 24) was used at verse 7. "False Christs" is only used here and Mark 13:22. "False prophets" was used at verse 11. "Sign" is used 77 times in the NT, first at Matt 12:38-39. This is the only use in Matthew of the noun "wonders" to describe miracles. The word is used 16 times; it denotes the human reaction to seeing miracles. "To deceive" was used at verse 4.

"To speak before" (ver. 25) is used only here in Matthew, out of 12 uses. "Inner room" (ver. 26) was used at 6:6; it is only used three more times: Matthew 24:26; Luke 12:3, 24. "Stars" (ver. 27) is used 9 times in the NT, only here in Matthew along with 28:3. "To shine" is used 31 times, first at 1:20. On "appearance" or "coming," see at verse 3. "Corpse" (ver. 28) is used 7 times, first at 14:12; it is also used at Matt. 24:28; Mark 6:29; 15:45; Rev. 11:8-9. "To gather together" is used first at 2:4.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

"Let him understand" (ver. 15) is an imperative in the third person. "I have told you before" (ver. 25) translates a verb in the perfect tense which illustrates the continuing power of Christ's message.

PARALLELS:

This paragraph is also found in 13:14-23 and Luke 21:20-24.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The phrase “abomination of desolation” comes from the prophecies of Daniel (9:24-27; 11:31; 12:11). In that context, particularly chapter 11, it seems to refer to Antiochus Epiphanes which happened in 168 B. C. when he set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and then sacrificed a pig (an unclean animal by the Law of Moses) on the altar. When the Roman legions trampled the temple, the “holy place,” they committed their own abominable act which desolated the temple.

Observe that Jesus said the prophecy was spoken “through” Daniel (ver. 15). First, this shows that Jesus attributes the prophet in its written form to Daniel the prophet. Many (most?) scholars want to reject the authorship of Daniel to the prophet but Jesus tells us Daniel wrote the prophecy. Secondly, Jesus’ statement shows that Daniel was not the source of the prophecy; he was only the one who wrote it down. The source, of course, is God. The reference to “one reading” does not necessarily imply this statement was added to Jesus’ words by Matthew; Jesus has challenged His audience on numerous occasions to read the OT with precision: 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31.

The Law of Moses also warned against false prophets; see Deuteronomy 13:2-4. Jesus’ warning against false Messiahs (ver. 24-25) is comparable.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The word “eagles” in verse 28 could be translated “vultures.” If one were to translate it “eagles,” it would match the prediction of the Roman armies since the eagle was the bird on the Roman military’s flags. Eagles do feed on dead animals.

COMMENTS:

In this paragraph, Jesus clearly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Luke’s account (21:20), Jesus says the abomination of desolation will occur when Jerusalem is “surrounded by armies,” the armies of Rome. These armies will be “standing in the holy place,” the temple of God (Matt. 24:15). Then in verse 15, Matthew challenges his readers to understand the message of Jesus as He applies the prophecies of Daniel to the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus Jesus is clearly referring to the events leading to the destruction of the Jews’ capital city in A. D. 70.

When that tragic event happens, Jesus warns His disciples to flee to the mountains. Archaeological evidence shows that the Christians fled to the village of Pella, 65 miles northeast of Jerusalem, east of the Jordan River. Those who are on the roofs of their homes should not take the time to come down into the house to take any belongings. The ones in the field should not return to take any further clothing. Women should pray that the events do not occur while they are pregnant or nursing, lest their flight to safety be hindered. For the same reason, the disciples should pray the catastrophe does not happen in the winter nor on the Sabbath, both of which would hinder movement, due to weather or city gates being closed (because of the Sabbath). The distress, or tribulation, will be great leading up to those dark days of destruction. In fact, and Jesus might be speaking hyperbolically, those days will be as dark as any the world (or the Jews) have ever known (ver. 21).

Pain comes in more than one form; it is not just physical. Imagine the mental anguish the Jews would have felt both at the destruction of their capital city but also at the destruction of their temple. If the temple symbolized to the Jews the presence of God and His approval, going back through the days of King David and Moses, imagine the heartache the average Jew would have felt when their beloved and glorious temple was desolated. In fact, the common perception of the era would be that the gods of the victorious Romans were shown to be superior to the God of the Jews in the destruction of Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem.

If God had not shortened the days of the siege of Jerusalem, no one would have been saved. But, for the sake of those who were members of the elect body of Christ (Christians), God caused the days to be shortened so that they could be saved. As Jesus had warned

before, many will claim to be the Messiah, but Jesus warned not to believe them. Many false Messiahs and false prophets will appear in the days of calamity to create disciples after themselves. They might even show “great signs,” false miracles, in order to deceive the followers of Christ. Yet, Jesus had warned His followers in advance (ver. 25) so that they should not have been deceived. One claiming to be the Messiah in the desert or an inner room perhaps is trying to avoid scrutiny.

The coming of the Son of Man, we believe here referring to judgment against Jerusalem, will be as visible as the lightning flashes. Christians, and Jews who would listen, would know that God’s judgment was now brought against Jerusalem, as Jesus had just prophesied in 23:34-39. Just as lightning was a sign of the visibility of God’s judgment against Israel, so are the vultures gathered around the corpse. If you see vultures circling in the sky, you know there is a corpse around close by. If the Christians see the Roman armies invading Jerusalem, they know that God’s wrath has now been poured out on His sinful and disobedient people (cf. 21:40-41).

APPLICATION:

Some Jews expected some type of “esoteric” revelation of the Messiah: John 7:27. These “false Christs” may be equivalent to the “antichrists” mentioned by the apostle John. However, it should be noted that the NT nowhere predicts the coming of one, single, extra-wicked “Antichrist.” Rather, when one reads the passages which mention the “antichrists” (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), one will note a few things: 1) They were already in existence in John’s day; 2) There were more than one; 3) They rejected the teaching that Jesus was God-in-the-flesh.

TRANSLATION - 24:29-31:

29 And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the heavens and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** And at that time, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and at that time they will mourn all the tribes of the earth and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with great trumpets, and they will gather together His elect out of the four winds from one end of heavens until the other end.

GREEK WORDS:

Jesus used “tribulation” (ver. 29) in 24:9, 21. “Sun” is used in 5:45. “To be darkened” is used 5 times: Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24; Rom. 1:21; 11:10; Rev. 8:12. “Moon” is used 9 times in the NT, only here in Matthew. “Light” or “brightness” is used twice: Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24. “Stars” is used as early as 2:2, 7, 9-10. This is its last use in Matthew’s gospel. “To shake” was used at 11:7. This is its last use in Matthew.

“To appear” or “to be visible” (ver. 30) is used 31 times in the NT; it is used first at 1:20. “Sign” was seen at verse 3. “To mourn” is used 8 times in the NT, first at 11:17. “Tribe” is used at 19:28. “Power” is used 119 times, first at 7:22. “Glory” is used 166 times in the NT, first at 4:8. “I will send” (ver. 31) is used 132 times in the NT, first at 2:16. “Angel” or “messenger” was used first at 1:20. “Trumpet” is used only here in Matthew, out of 11 times in the NT. “To gather together” is used at 23:37 and here, out of 8 uses. “Elect” is used at verse 22.

PARALLELS:

This paragraph is also found at Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:25-28.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Jewish writings which anticipated the fall or destruction of pagan nations would portray that destruction in terms of a universal, cosmic catastrophe. See Isaiah 13:10, 19 for the fall of

Babylon; Isaiah 34:4 for the fall of Edom; Ezekiel 32:7-8 for the fall of Egypt; Haggai 2:6, 21. See also Joel 2:10; Amos 8:9. David uses similar language in 2 Samuel 22:8-14.

The “trumpet” imagery comes from passages such as Isaiah 27:13. The nations mourning refers to Zechariah 12:10. Relative to Zechariah, 11:4-14 pictures the rejected shepherd (fulfilled in Matthew 27:9-10) while 13:7-9 pictures the shepherd killed by the sword (fulfilled in Matthew 26:31). Zechariah 9:9 has already been fulfilled in Matthew (21:5). What all this strongly implies is that Zechariah 9-14 relates to the (first) coming of Christ, His death, burial, resurrection, and judgment against Jerusalem which is fulfilled in A. D. 70. By the time Jerusalem mourns over what they have done to the Son of God (Zech. 12:10), it will be too late.

The gathering of God’s people (ver. 31) echoes Deuteronomy 30:4.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For works written between the Old Testament and New Testament which uses this “apocalyptic imagery” in reference to the fall of nations, see: 1 Enoch 80:4; 4 Ezra 5:4-5; Testament of Moses 10:5.

COMMENTS:

We do not believe that his paragraph refers to the second coming of Christ. Jesus tells His apostles that His words will be fulfilled during the lifetime of their generation (ver. 34). Secondly, Jesus uses the word “immediately.” Third, He refers to the “tribulation of those days,” which He has been discussing. The word “tribulation” has already been used at verse 9 and verse 21, both of which refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. There is no reason to believe Jesus is changing topics, yet.

We further do not believe that the changes in the sun and moon refer to the second coming of Christ because at that point, the sun and moon *will be destroyed*. Peter makes this clear (2 Peter 3:10) and other passages do as well (Matt. 5:18; Heb. 1:12). In this very text (24:35), Jesus states the heavens and earth will “pass away.” The sun and moon *darkening* is apocalyptic language to refer to the catastrophic end coming to the city of Jerusalem and her temple and the change these will effect on the nation of Israel as a whole. The language does not refer to the final destruction of the world. For passages in the OT which use this language to refer to a temporal (earthly) judgment, see above under “References to the OT”.

When Jerusalem, Israel, and others who are interested in listening, see the destruction of Jerusalem, they will know that the kingdom of the Messiah has been established and that the Son of Man is now sitting at the right hand of God (see 26:64). Verse 30 relates to the “sign of the Son of Man.” This “sign” relates, again, to the destruction of Jerusalem and its indication that Jesus is receiving the kingdom, as Daniel 7:13-14 has predicted and as Jesus has been teaching since 4:17. The tribes of the earth refer to the tribes of Israel, mourning over their loss and finally recognizing that Jesus has received His kingdom “with power and great glory.”

Those who *are* Christ’s, His followers, will be protected spiritually, if not physically, in the ensuing destruction of Jerusalem. The angels are Christ’s ministering spirits, sent out to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). If any are killed in the destruction of Jerusalem and the following days, they will be gathered together, by Christ’s angels, into His care, in contrast to the nation of Israel who rejected His efforts to gather them (23:37-39).

We largely reject the application of this paragraph to the second coming of Christ, which is common among writers, for this primary reason. Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem (verses 1-4) and He says that His generation will not pass away until “all these things are fulfilled” (ver. 34). Those two statements are “bookends” that block off this whole discussion to refer to that one event. Also, as we have shown, the language of verses 29-31 was used in the OT in a way similar to how Jesus is using it here - as a figurative description of the destruction of a nation or city - we find our interpretation to be most consistent with its context and this specific literary genre.

APPLICATION:

The apostle Peter likewise uses language of universal catastrophe in Acts 2:16-20, quoting Joel 2:28-32, as he pictures the destruction of the Jewish nation (as Jesus does in this context) as it is replaced by the Christian nation. Paul uses the trumpet imagery as he pictures the second coming of Christ in 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16.

TRANSLATION - 24:32-35:

32 And from the fig tree, learn the parable: Whenever its branch may be tender and the leaf may sprout, you know that the end is near. **33** Thus also you yourselves, whenever you may see all these things, you know that the end is near, [at] the door. **34** Truly I say to you that this generation will not at all pass away until when all these things may happen. **35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not at all pass away.

GREEK WORDS:

“Fig tree” (ver. 32) is used first at 21:19-21. “To learn” is the verb form of the noun, “disciple.” It was used first at 9:13. “Parable” is used first at 13:3. “Tender” is used only here and Mark 13:28. “Leaf” is used 6 times: Matt. 21:19; 24:32; Mark 11:13; 13:28; Rev. 22:2. “To put forth” or “to sprout” is used here and Mark 13:28. “Near” is used 31 times in the NT, here is the first time. “To pass away” (ver. 34) is used 29 times in the NT; it is used first at 5:18. “Generation” is used 43 times in the NT, first at 1:17. In Matthew, the word always refers to the people alive at that time: 1:17; 11:16; 12:39, 41, 45; 23:36. See also Mark 8:38; Luke 11:50-51; 17:25.

PARALLELS:

This parable is found in Mark (13:28-31) and Luke (21:29-33).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Several problems contributed to the revolt of the Jews which led to their destruction in A. D. 70 under the Roman general (later an emperor) Titus. There were religious issues; the Jews were strictly monotheistic and the Romans were enthusiastically polytheistic. The Jews had pride in their own country and their history and hoped to, one day, be independent again as they had been under Kings David and Solomon. Also, the Jews were antagonistic to the taxation system of the Romans, both because of the exorbitant amounts collected and because the taxes were used to finance so much of the empire that was intertwined with pagan rituals, beliefs, and practices.

The Jews had led revolts before but the revolt they led in A. D. 66 finally led the Roman leaders to heavily suppress the revolt. The governor of that region, Syria, led some forces against the Jews but were defeated. This encouraged the Jews, but Rome’s military commander, Vespasian, put down the rebels. He became distracted by a civil war in A. D. 68-69 (which might be the “shortened days” from verse 22). He left his son, Titus, in charge as Vespasian was appointed emperor. Titus finally destroyed Jerusalem and the temple was burned to the ground in A. D. 70. Christians escaped to a village called Pella while many Jews defended themselves in a village called Masada. Eventually, the Jews at Masada committed mass suicide rather than surrender to the pagans.

Under Emperor Hadrian, Jerusalem’s name would be changed to Aelia Capitolina and the site of the former temple of Jehovah God was used to build a temple to Zeus. The Jews rebelled a final time under the leadership of a Simon Bar Kochba (the “son of the star” based on Numbers 24:17). That revolt was decisively defeated in A. D. 135. Jerusalem was left a complete ruin.

COMMENTS:

This paragraph summarizes what Jesus has said to this point. When the fig tree produces leaves, one knows that summer is near. When one sees the events Jesus has described up to verse 31, he will know that the destruction of the temple (their original

question: verse 3) has occurred and the prophecy of 23:37-39 has been fulfilled. The phrase “He is near” relates to the coming of Jesus *in judgment* against Jerusalem. Jesus refers to the “end” of verses 6, 14.

Jesus emphasizes (“Truly...”) that His generation will not *at all* (the language is emphatic) pass away until “these things” (up to verse 31) have taken place. In every occurrence of the word “generation” in Matthew, it refers to His living contemporaries (see above under “Words”). There is no reason to believe the word here is used differently (see especially 23:36, 38).

His generation, one day, will “pass away” (ver. 34) but heaven and earth will not “pass away” (ver. 35; using the same verb) before His words “pass away.” Jesus emphatically declares His words are reliable; they are trustworthy; they are true. Jesus sets His words on the same level of durability as the words of Jehovah God in the OT: Isa. 51:6; 54:10; Jer. 31:35-36; 33:20-21, 25-26.

APPLICATION:

In this student’s view, verse 35 ends the discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem. At the trial of Jesus, in Matthew 27:25, the Jews cried out to the governor, “Let His blood be on us and on our children!” That cry received its awful and dreadful fulfillment in the destruction of their capital and their house of worship.

Jesus emphasizes the power, durability, and importance of His words, as He did in Matthew 5:18. This places His words on a level with the words of the Father: Psalm 119:89-90; Isaiah 40:6-8.

TRANSLATION - 24:36-44:

36 And concerning that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son, except the Father only. **37** For just as the days of Noah, thus it will be the appearance of the Son of Man. **38** For as they were in the days before the flood eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until which the days entered Noah into the ark, **39** And they did not know until the flood came and took away all, thus will be [also] the appearance of the Son of Man. **40** At that time there will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left. **41** Two will grind in the hand mill, one will be taken and one will be left. **42** Therefore beware, because you do not know which day your Lord will come. **43** And that you know that if the householder might have known which watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and not have permitted to break through his house. **44** On account of these things also you yourselves be ready, because do not think the hour the Son of Man is coming.

GREEK WORDS:

“Angels” (ver. 36) is used at verse 31. “Father” is used first at 2:22. “Noah” is mentioned 8 times in the NT; only here in Matthew: 24:37-38. “Appearance” or “coming” (ver. 37) is found in this context only in Matthew: 24:3, 37, 37, 39. “Flood” (ver. 38) is used 4 times: Matt. 24:38-39; Luke 17:27; 2 Peter 2:5. “To eat” is used 6 times, only here in Matthew. “To drink” is used 73 times in the NT, first at 6:25, 31. “To marry” is used 28 times in the NT, first at 5:32. “To be given in marriage” is used 7 times; in the Matthew at 22:30; 24:38. The “ark” is only mentioned 6 times: Matt. 24:38; Luke 17:27; Heb. 9:4; 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; Rev. 11:19.

“To take” (ver. 40) is used 49 times, first at 1:20. “To leave” is used first at 3:15. “To grind” (ver. 41) is used only here and Luke 17:35. “Hand mill” is used only at 18:6; 24:41; Mark 9:42; Rev. 18:22. “To beware” (ver. 42) is used 22 times in the NT; here is its first use in Matthew (see also 24:42-43; 25:13; 26:38, 40-41).

“Householder” (ver. 43) is used 12 times, first at 10:25. “Watch” is found first at 5:25. “Thief” is found 16 times, first at 6:19-20. “To beware” is used at verse 42. “To let” or “to permit” is used here only in Matthew, out of 11 times in the NT. “To break through” is used four times: Matthew 6:19-20; 24:43; Luke 12:39. “House” is used in 2:11 first. It is used 93 times in the NT.

PARALLELS:

This paragraph is also found in Mark (13:32-37) and Luke (17:26-30, 34-36).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The account of Noah was written in Genesis 6-9; see especially 6:5-24. Peter also refers to Noah's salvation in the flood in the context of the destruction of the world; see 2 Peter 2:5; 3:6.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The "hand mill" at verse 41 refers to a small mill found in the home used to grind wheat or barley into meal for baking bread.

COMMENTS:

Now that Jesus has brought up the *actual* destruction of the world (at His second coming; ver. 35), He begins talking about the second coming which covers the rest of chapter 24 and all of chapter 25. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming of Christ (in judgment of the world) could happen at any moment. Thus it was necessary for Jesus to move from the discussion of one destruction (of Jerusalem) into a discussion of the other destruction (of the world). He gives three parables related to the second coming: 24:45-51; 25:1-13; 14-30; followed by a picture of the final judgment: 25:31-46.

The phrases "and concerning" and "that day and hour" show that Jesus is moving from a discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem to a discussion when the "heavens and earth will pass away." The word "day" in the singular particularly marks a contrast with the word in the plural used above (ver. 19, 22, 29). The singular "day" or "hour" will be used at 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13. Also, earlier Jesus said the time of the destruction of Jerusalem could be predicted (ver. 34) and suggested signs (ver. 15). The destruction of the world, however, will happen when no one expects it, a teaching with which the rest of the NT writers are in agreement (see below under "Application" under 24:45-51).

APPLICATION:

While Jesus, in the flesh, did not know when He would return, the Father does know because He has appointed that specific time: Acts 17:31.

The fact that Jesus did not know the time of His return should not lead anyone to doubt His full divinity, even on earth. Jesus limited Himself when He poured Himself out to become flesh (Phil. 2:6-8). This inevitably led to some limitations in His physical presence. Thus He became tired, was hungry, and thirsty: Matt. 4:2; 21:18; John 4:6; 19:28. That is why the Holy Spirit had to empower Him to perform His miracles (Luke 4:14).

John will also warn Christians of his generation, in the middle of persecution by the Roman Empire, that Christ might still come as a thief in the night (Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

TRANSLATION - 24:45-51:

45 Who, then, is the faithful slave and prudent whom the lord appointed over his household, to give to them the food at the [right] time? **46** Blessed [is] that slave whom, after coming, his lord will find [him] thus doing. **47** Truly I say to you that over all his belongings, he will appoint him. **48** But if that evil slave may say in his heart, 'My lord delays,' **49** and he might begin to beat his fellow slaves, and he may eat and he may drink with those drunk, **50** the lord of that slave will be present in the day which he does not anticipate or in the hour which he does not know. **51** And he will cut him in two and his share will be assigned with the hypocrites; there, there will be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.

GREEK WORDS:

“Faithful” (ver. 45) is used here, for the first time in Matthew. It is used four times in the following parable: 25:21, 23. The word is used 67 times in the NT. “Slave” was used first at 8:9. “Wise” or “prudent” was used first at 7:24. It is a key word in the next parable: 25:2, 4, 8-9. “To appoint” or “to put in charge” is used here (24:45, 47) and in 25:21, 23. The verb is used 21 times in the NT. “Household” is used only here in the NT. “Food” or “provision” was used first at 3:4.

“Blessed” (ver. 46) was used extensively in chapter 5 (5:3-11), at 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; and here in Matthew. It is used 50 times in the NT. “To find” was used first at 1:18. “Truly” (ver. 47) is used 129 times in the NT; it was first used at 5:18. Matthew uses “truly” 31 times as Jesus emphasizes what He says. “To be present” or “to be at one’s disposal” or “belongings” was used first at 19:21. The word is a verb although we have translated it as a noun.

“Evil” (ver. 48) was first used at 21:41. Matthew will use the adjective again here and at 27:23. “Heart” was first used at 5:8. “To take time,” “to delay,” or “to stay away” is used here and at 25:5 in Matthew; it is also used in Luke 1:21; 12:45 and Hebrews 10:37. “To beat” (ver. 49) is used here and at 27:30 in Matthew. The NT uses the word 13 times. “Fellow slave” was used first at 18:28-29, 31-33. The word is used 10 times in the NT: Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 6:11; 19:10; 22:9. “To be drunk” is a verb while we have translated it as a noun; it is used here; Acts 2:15; 1 Cor. 11:21; 1 Thess. 5:7; Rev. 17:6.

“To anticipate” (ver. 50) is used 16 times in the NT, first at 11:3. This is its last use in Matthew. “To cut in two” (ver. 51) is used only here and Luke 12:46. “Hypocrite” was used first at 6:2, 5, 16. Jesus uses the word six times in Matthew 23 (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). The word is used 17 times in the NT. “To appoint” or “to assign” is used 100 times in the NT; it was used first at 5:15. “Weeping” was used first at 2:18; in the expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” it is used at: 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; here; 25:30 and Luke 13:28. “Gnashing” was used first at 8:12. See the passages previously mentioned for its description of hell as the place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

PARALLELS:

There is a parallel text to this paragraph at Luke 12:41-48.

COMMENTS:

While the return of the lord is unknown (verse 50), his servants seem to give no concern to their behavior in his absence. A “faithful and prudent” slave will treat his fellow slaves respectably because he does not know when his master will come. Thus he will be ready at all times in order to be prepared to present the harvest at the right time. When that happens, the lord will be pleased with his servant and he will appoint him over all his belongings (ver. 47).

However, if an evil slave reasons in his heart that his lord is not returning for a long time, he may very well beat his fellow slaves and get drunk with the drunkards. At that point, the lord will return when the slave is not expecting him and catch him engaging in selfish behavior. When that happens, the master will cut the slave into pieces and throw him in with other hypocrites, into the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Clearly, this prediction of the pain and sorrows of hell cannot be taken entirely literally; it is not likely sinners will be cut into pieces. This is the only place in Scripture where such a metaphor is used of human beings; otherwise, it refers to sacrificed animals. The idea, however, is that pain (cf. 18:34) will be experienced and one will be spending eternity with people (hypocrites) whom one avoided in his lifetime.

God has designed this universe so that death is both sure and unsure. Death is sure in the sense that all living beings are going to die at some point. Genesis 5 illustrates that and Hebrews 9:27 states it emphatically. God has designed humans in a physical way so that death will come. It is important to know that, so that man can be prepared to stand before the judgment throne of God and be prepared to give an answer for how he or she lived their life here on earth (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Death is also unsure relative to when it will happen for each of us. God does not intend humans to serve him only out of fear of death. If humans knew when Jesus would return, we

would not serve Him out of love. We would serve ourselves up until the last minute and then we would “convert” in order to avoid hell. There is no indication in Scripture that we might know when each of us will die nor that God Himself has chosen a specific time for each of us to die. Thus, God has designed, in His wisdom and power, a world in which death is both certain and uncertain.

APPLICATION:

In contrast to the destruction of Jerusalem, which had signs which would warn the Christians to flee Jerusalem, the second coming of Christ will have no signs. He will come physically as a thief in the night: 1 Thess. 4:14-18; 5:2, 4; 2 Peter 3:10. See also 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:8-11; 2 Thess. 2:13-15. However, there is no verse which teaches Jesus will return *to earth*.

Christians need to be prepared every moment of every day in order to be alert when Jesus returns: 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8. Some Christians in Paul's day were disappointed that Jesus had not yet come (2 Thess. 2:1-3).