

# **Rightly Dividing Matthew 24**

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**Text:** Matthew 24:1-26:1

### **Introduction:**

- I. The Olivet Discourse. The location may be the only point of universal understanding and agreement on this exchange between Jesus and His disciples.
  - A. Some believe Jesus is talking about only the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
    1. “Realized Eschatology” or “The A.D. 70 Doctrine” advocates teach that all Bible prophecy, including everything in Matthew 24, was fulfilled in Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70.
      - a. Proponents argue that the resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming of Christ, and the universal judgment of all men have already taken place.
  - B. Some conclude Jesus is talking about only His Second Coming at the end of time.
    1. “Premillennialists” view Matthew 24 as an end-time description by which one can determine the characteristic events, and therefore the general time when the Lord will return to earth and establish His kingdom for a 1,000 year “millennial reign.”
      - a. This view supports future fulfillment and expectation of Armageddon, the Rapture, etc., and denies Christ now reigns as a King with a kingdom.
  - C. Many conclude that Jesus discusses both in Matthew 24.
    1. The immediate context argues as much: the exchange about the destruction of the temple, a hike across the Kidron valley, then “as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple” (Mark 13:3) looking across at the temple complex.
    2. Yet ultimately, Jesus shifts to discuss a judgment that is presented as universal (25:32) not local, and with consequences that are eternal (25:46) not temporal.
- II. Those who agree that Jesus discusses both events differ about where or how He transitions.
  - A. J.W. McGarvey argues the transition occurs at Matthew 24:29, noting “that the term ‘immediately’ must be understood in a modified sense.” (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 210)
  - B. J. Marcellus Kik says that in verse 36 Christ begins to describe His Second Coming. (Kik, 85)
  - C. Some understand the transition to occur in chapter 25: verse 1 (Barnes, 264) or 31. (Chumbley, 444; Clarke, 242)
  - D. Sellers S. Crain and Kyle Pope conclude that Jesus discusses both, but that He “alternated” (Crain, 307) or does so by moving “back and forth between the subjects of AD 70 and final judgment in order to draw distinctions between the two.” (Pope, *When Will These Things Be?*, 344)
- III. Matthew 24 is a controversial passage that raises many important questions.
  - A. Does the chapter discuss the destruction of Jerusalem or the Second Coming or both?
  - B. Is there a transition from one to the other? If so, where?
  - C. How do we “rightly divide” Matthew 24?
- IV. These are the questions that we want to explore and attempt to answer in our study of this contentious passage.

### **Body:**

## I. Keys to Understanding this Discourse

- A. Jesus describes an event preceded by perceptible signs.
1. “Therefore when you see... flee to the mountains” (24:15-16) and “so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize...” (24:33).
    - a. Jesus indicates that not only would His followers be able, even expected to perceive the signs, but the signs would be intended to drive timely action, and there would be hope of escape.
    - b. “These things” would be as discernable as the changing of the seasons (24:32).
  2. Jesus affirms this event will happen within **the disciples' normal lifespan**.
    - a. “Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place” (24:34).
      - 1) This is the natural meaning of the phrase “this generation.”
      - 2) Both premillennialists and preterists attempt to redefine the phrase to align with their respective interpretations of this passage. (Pope, *Comm.*, 868-869)
        - a) “The reasonable way to take Jesus’ reference to this generation is as a reference to those living at the time Jesus spoke these words.” (Pope, 869)
    3. Jesus is elaborating upon His shocking revelation of the forthcoming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (24:2) at the hands of a Roman army in A.D. 70.
  - B. Jesus also describes an event with no perceptible signs.
    1. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (24:36).
      - a. This “coming of the Son of Man” will come upon the people as suddenly and unexpectedly as the flood in the days of Noah (24:37-39).
    2. Jesus transitions to address His personal, visible Second Coming that will yet occur at a time known only to the Father (24:36) at the end of the world.  - C. The remaining question is where and how does He transition between discussing the two.

## II. The Physical Setting Provides the Initial Context and Subject Matter (24:1-3a).

- A. The **physical structure then standing on the temple mount** is the subject under discussion.
1. Jesus had just come out from it (24:1; Mark 13:1).
    - a. The discourse directly follows His harsh rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (23:1-36). “The teachers of the (Mosaic) law and the Pharisees represent the official Jewish religious institution of Jesus’ day and the temple serves as a symbol for this institution.” (Nel, 1)
    - b. The echoes of Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem reverberate throughout the discourse, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (23:38).
  2. His disciples engaged Him by admiring its buildings (24:1; Mark 13:1; Luke 21:5).
  3. Jesus’ response concerned the physical destruction of **those same structures** (24:2).
- B. The location of this follow-up discussion provided a panoramic view of the temple complex.
1. Jesus was “sitting on the Mount of Olives” (24:3a) when His disciples were questioning Him. Mark points out that it was “Peter and James and John and Andrew” who were questioning Him privately (Mark 13:3).

- a. With Jesus's shocking declaration of the destruction of the temple still ringing in their ears, His followers had exited the temple area with Him and walked down into the Kidron Valley.
  - b. They followed Jesus up the slope until "he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple" (Mark 13:3). When they sat down with Him, **their view would have been back across the valley to Jerusalem, the temple prominent in the skyline.**
  - c. This little group would have been looking at "these things" (24:2) when the disciples asked for clarification about "these things" (24:3b).
- C. The disciples were seeking clarification about the prophecy they had just heard. They wanted to know when the present temple would be destroyed, when "not one stone **here** will be left upon another" (24:2).

### III. Two Questions and a Flawed Premise (24:3b)

- A. Their first question was, "Tell us, when will these things happen?"
  - 1. In response to Jesus' jarring declaration, the disciples ask initially, and expectedly, in effect, "When will this temple be reduced to a pile of stones?"
- B. Their second question is, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"
  - 1. This question reveals that they had made an understandable, yet unnecessary and incorrect inference. "Jesus had said nothing of his coming nor the end of the world; but to these four disciples the destruction of the temple seemed an event of such magnitude that they could not but associate it with the end of all things." (McGarvey, *Fourfold*, 411)
  - 2. They are asking, "How will we know when **all of these things** are about to happen?"
- C. Their second question was based upon a flawed premise. The disciples incorrectly assumed these events would all happen at the same time. In their questions, **the disciples incorrectly conflate the destruction of the temple with the Lord's personal return and the end of the world.**
  - 1. The parallel passages make it even clearer that the disciples expected all "these things" to occur simultaneously:
    - a. "Tell us, when will **these things** be, and what will be the sign when **all these things** are going to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:4)
    - b. "They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will **these things** happen? And what will be the sign when **these things** are about to take place?" (Luke 21:7).
  - 2. The disciples use of the word **parousia** (24:3) to inquire of Jesus' "coming" seems to underscore their expectation that the temple would be destroyed at the Lord's visible, personal Second Coming.
    - a. STRONG'S 3952 *Parousia* (*par-oo-see'-ah*) – "In the N. T. especially of the advent, i.e., the **future, visible**, return from heaven of Jesus, the Messiah, **to raise the dead, hold the last judgment**, and to set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God" (Thayer)
    - b. Among the synoptic writers, only Matthew uses *parousia*, and he uses the word only in this passage (24:3, 27, 37, 39).
    - c. The use of *parousia* is important to the understanding of this exchange. The word is a marker for when the immediate subject switches from Jesus' figurative

“coming” (*erchomai* – 24:30) in judgment against Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to His personal, visible Second Coming (*parousia*) which the faithful yet anticipate.

- 1) In verse 3, the disciples use *parousia* due to confusion, incorrectly conflating His personal, visible Second Coming with the predicted destruction of Jerusalem (24:2) that prompted their question.
  - 2) In verse 27, Jesus makes reference to His literal *parousia* to contrast the conspicuous nature of His still future, personal, visible Second Coming with false reports of His personal “coming” in A.D. 70.
  - 3) In verses 37 & 39, Jesus uses *parousia* to distinguish and describe His personal, visible Second Coming, an event that, like the flood in the days of Noah, will be preceded by no perceptible signs.
3. The disciples’ use of the phrase “**end of the age**” (24:3) confirms their flawed assumption that all the things they were asking about (the destruction of the temple and Jesus’ Second Coming) would happen concurrently with final judgment **at the end of the world**.
- a. It seems evident that the disciples would use the term “end of the age” in the same way they had heard Jesus use it and Matthew recorded and used it in Matthew 13 and 28.
    - 1) In explaining the Parable of the Tares (13:24-30) Jesus says “and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at **the end of the age**. (13:39-40).
    - 2) Similarly, the Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-50) concludes with “So it will be at **the end of the age**; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
    - 3) In both parables, **Jesus used “the end of the age” to talk about final judgment that will occur at His Second Coming**, and that’s what the disciples said they understood (13:51).
    - 4) Additionally, consider Matthew’s consistent use of the phrase. Jesus said “lo, I am with you always, even to **the end of the age**” (28:18). Was that to be understood as I am with you just until A.D. 70?
  - b. The phrase “end of the age” with its clear tie to the Second Coming, end of time, and final judgment does not appear throughout the remainder of the chapter. Jesus, instead, uses the phrase “the end” and the phrase is not restricted to a single meaning. Primarily, He uses “the end” with reference to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (with **one exception**). The physical destruction of the temple is “the end” which He had predicted and that had prompted the confused question which He is correcting as He answers. Further, the phrase “the end” (24:6, 14) is used in association with perceptible signs.
    - 1) Jesus says that observable incidents of natural and societal upheaval will occur during the next 40 years, but they are not the sign that the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem is imminent, “but that is not yet the end” (24:6).
    - 2) The **exception** is found in verse 13. Jesus speaks of “the end” in connection with individual salvation, as opposed to an historic event. The “end” here should be understood to be as personal and individual as the endurance. One who endures to one’s end will be saved. (see IV. B. 4.)

- 3) The meaning of “the end” is made clear in verse 14. Having concluded His warning not to be deluded by false signs, He says, “and then the end will come” and immediately references the definite sign of the impending destruction of the temple and the holy city, the sign of the prophet Daniel (24:15). Daniel had been told, “and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its **end** will come with a flood...” (Dan. 9:26). (see V. A.)
  - c. Jesus does not use “end of the age” in His answer because He is correcting His questioners’ misunderstanding. Jesus knew what they did not. The “end” for the temple would come well before the “end of the age.” If Jesus intended for “end” to equate with “end of the age” why would He not have used the exact term “end of the age”? That is the exact term His questioners had just used (24:3), and He, Himself, had previously used the precise term “end of the age” when He intended to discuss His Second Coming and final judgment (13:40, 49). The “end” in verses 6 and 14 is the destruction of the city and the temple in A.D. 70.
  - 4. Albeit unwittingly, **the disciples had asked Jesus about both the destruction of Jerusalem and His Second Coming**. Jesus, knowing that the destruction of Jerusalem and His Second Coming (final judgment, end of the world) would be separate events, had every reason to correct His followers’ flawed premise in His answer.
    - a. “Certainly, they did not yet understand that He would later ascend to heaven and then return in judgment. They may well have imagined that if the temple were destroyed, that would be the same time when condemnation would come, and the dead would be raised.” (Pope, *When Will These Things Be?*, 349)
  - 5. We would expect Jesus’ answer to address both events and therefore, to distinguish between the two events. The disciples first question, however, was about the physical destruction of the temple. That is the initial subject of Jesus’ response.
- D. In His response, Jesus divides the future events leading up to the destruction of the temple into **three distinct, sequential time periods**.
- 1. First, in verses 4-14, He warns His disciples not to be misled by tumultuous events that will transpire in **the approximately four decades between** the time of this discourse and the immediate run-up to **the siege of Jerusalem** (A.D. 66-70).
  - 2. Then (24:15-28), Jesus references the prophet Daniel to emphasize that they would see “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Luke 21:20) and should then recognize the need and opportunity they would have to escape the tribulations, false Christs and false prophets that would appear during the protracted **days** of the siege.
  - 3. Finally, in verses 29-31, He discusses **the ultimate fall of the city** (A.D. 70), with the resultant destruction of the temple, and the accompanying end of the Jewish system.

#### IV. First Beware of Misleading Signs in the Intervening Years (24:4-14)

- A. During the roughly 40-year period between the Olivet Discourse and the siege of Jerusalem, Jesus knew His followers (not unlike moderns) might be inclined to misinterpret false Messianic claims (24:4), catastrophic world events (24:6-8), and persecution of the righteous (24:9-14) as indications of His imminent judgment. Jesus warned His disciples not to be misled by:
1. False Messiahs (24:5).
    - a. “The Jews expected that the Messiah would set up a political kingdom and deliver them from the Romans. It enhanced the power of any political leader to

claim to be the Messiah. It was altogether natural that many would make such a claim.” (Kik, 34)

- b. “Both Scripture and the historical record reveal that there were those who tried to draw people after them. The book of Acts records Gamaliel’s recounting of a false leader named Theudas who rose up “claiming to be somebody” (Acts 5:36). According to Josephus, he tried to draw followers to come to him at the Jordan, claiming that he would part the river (*Antiquities* 20.5.1).” (Pope, Comm., 831)
  - c. Josephus wrote of “many, who pretending to Divine inspiration, deceived the people...” (*War*, B ii. C. 13)
  - d. Kik records references from several early Christian writers (Justin, Jerome, and Irenaeus) regarding the divinity claims of one Simon Magus, as well as a Dositheus mentioned by Origen. He then quotes Josephus writing “about the time of Felix who is mentioned in Acts: ‘Now as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was again filled with robbers and imposters, who deluded the multitude.’” (Kik, 35)
  - e. Jesus did not want His followers to be deluded.
2. Wars, Rumors of Wars, Famines and Earthquakes (24:6-8).
    - a. Chumbley summarizes the atmosphere in Judea during the time period as “wracked by political and social instability.” (Chumbley, 419)
    - b. “Philo and Josephus describe the disturbed state of Judea from this date to the siege of Jerusalem. Massacres of the Jews were perpetrated at Caesarea, and Alexandria, in Babylonia and in Syria.” (Carr, 266)
    - c. This was a time of stress upon the internal stability of the Roman Empire beyond the region of Palestine: “The inevitable consequence of Nero’s perfidious and irresponsible conduct was revolt. Public misfortunes and defeats in Britain which devastated two important towns, and in Armenia, where the Roman legions were captured and the entire province of Syria was endangered, aroused popular sentiment. Rival generals in various provinces sought to seize the empire to gratify their lust for power and produced almost complete chaos.” (Tenney, 305)
    - d. In addition to political instability, the interval was marked by natural disasters.
      - 1) Most notably, and likely the greatest direct impact upon the audience, was the famine that precipitated the sharing of Gentile churches with needy saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15; cf. Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25-31).
        - a) Additionally, McGarvey referenced the writings of Roman historians Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and others that attest to: “at least one pestilence, during which thirty-thousand persons perished in Rome alone; and five earthquakes... they sufficiently attest the literal fulfillment of the Savior’s prediction.” (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 204)
      - 2) “Alford enumerates the earthquakes as follows: 1. A great earthquake in Crete, A.D. 46 or 47. 2. One at Rome when Nero assumed the manly toga, A.D. 51. 3. One at Apamaea in Phrygia, mentioned by Tacitus, A.D. 53, 4. One at Laodicea in Phrygia, A.D. 60, 5. One in Campania, A.D. 62 or 63.” (McGarvey, *Fourfold*, 412)
    - 3. The questioners were assured that the events just described though worrisome, were not “the end” of the temple and the Jewish system. They were simply precursors that pointed to impending, greater suffering for the nation.

- a. “But all these things are merely the beginnings of birth pangs” (24:8).
  - b. “All these” is comprehensive, referring to the totality of tumults and troubles cited in 24:4-7.
  - c. These are but a prelude – “the beginning of sorrows (*odin*, labor pains).”
    - 1) In apocalyptic language, “labor pain” often signifies a period of suffering that precedes the close of an old age or the onset of a new.” (Cumby, 420) This was not yet the end of the temple and the Jewish nation.
- B. Jesus then warned His audience that there would be contemporary tribulation for the faithful (24:9-14). The first set of warnings would impact the populous at large; however, Jesus now discusses suffering that will be peculiar to His followers.
1. Accounts early in the book of Acts confirm that His followers would be delivered to authorities, hated, and killed for the name of Jesus.
    - a. Almost immediately, Peter and John would be arrested for proclaiming Jesus: “As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening” (Acts 4:1-3).
    - b. “But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail” (Acts 5:17-18).
    - c. Early persecution culminated in the martyrdom of Steven (Acts 7) and resulting in the church in Jerusalem being “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...” (Acts 8:2). Later, King Herod had James “put to death with the sword” (Acts 12:2).
    - d. Paul’s personal testimony serves to paint a composite picture of the suffering of His followers: “Are they servants of Christ? --I speak as if insane-- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:23-28).
  2. Jesus warned that the persecution would take its toll, and many who began to follow Him would not persevere but fall away. And those who were to be distinguished by their love for one another, sadly, would turn on each other.
    - a. Probably the best-known example is Demas. Of whom Paul famously wrote, “for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me” (2 Tim. 4:10).
    - b. Paul addresses selfish and self-serving motives among brethren in writing the Philippians. “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry... The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment” (Phil. 1:15-17).

3. The rest of Acts and the epistles detail the work of false teachers and false brethren (2 Cor. 11:26), such as the Judaizers, and those who fell under their sway. The love of many, in fact, would grow cold.
  - a. “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:3-7).
  - b. “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will be false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (2 Pet. 2:1-3).
  - c. On this point, consider Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and **from among your own selves** men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 29:29-30).
4. Jesus ended His dire warning with a statement of hopeful encouragement: “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (24:13). Here, “the end” is best understood not as “the end of the age” (24:3) or even “the end” for the temple and Jerusalem (24:6, 14), but as a plea for their personal faithfulness to endure through tribulation.
  - a. “The end, then, is not the end mentioned before in verse 6, but the end of life; and the promise is, that he who would resist the false prophets, and would not allow his love to be cooled by the abounding iniquity, until the end of his life, would be saved.” (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 206)
    - 1) “End” refers to the end of the trial. A chief corollary of faith is endurance. Christ expects His people to live without breakdown, resisting the temptation to compromise their faith under adverse conditions (Jas. 1:2-4, 12, Rev. 2:7, 10).” (Chumbley, 421)
    - b. Luke words the charge this way: “By your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:19).
5. The Lord also included a statement to let His disciples know that despite the hardships and persecution, much good would be accomplished through their efforts. In the years between this conversation and the destruction of the temple, “the gospel of the kingdom will be spread to the whole world.”
  - a. The term “whole world” refers to the Roman world of the first century. It is with that understanding that we should read Paul’s confirmation of this prophecy when he wrote to the Colossians, circa 63 A.D., “Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing” (Col. 1:5-6), and that “the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Col. 1:23). This was about seven years before “the end” for the temple in 70 A.D.

6. After painting a bleak picture of the next 40 or so years, Jesus said, “and then the end shall come” – all these things will precede “the end” that prompted the disciple’s question in verse 3, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem.

#### V. Then, when you see the sign of Daniel... the siege of Jerusalem (24:15-28)

- A. His questioners had asked for a sign (24:3) to let them know when the destruction of the temple would be nigh. “Therefore when you see **the abomination of desolation** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)” (24:15). Jesus refers them back to the prophet Daniel for the sign, and Matthew, when writing this discourse down, parenthetically warns his readers to make the connection, see and flee.
  1. Daniel used the language of “abomination of desolation” twice with reference to the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes (168 B.C.):
    - a. Dan. 11:31 - “Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.”
    - b. Dan. 12:11 - “From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.”
  2. Daniel, however, does contain a use of “abomination” and “desolation” **with reference to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70** (Dan. 9:27). It is included in the vision of Seventy-Weeks which Gabriel shows Daniel instructing him, “so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision” (Dan. 9:23).
    - a. Dan. 9:27 – “on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed...” or “**the abomination of desolation** will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out...” (CSB).
      - 1) The “decreed destruction” ties this prophecy to the “end” of the temple, city, and Jewish system at the hands of the Roman army in A.D. 70. It marks the end of the “seventy weeks” that were “decreed about your people and your holy city” during the final week of which, “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined” (Dan. 9:24-27). That is the ultimate answer to Daniel’s questions about the future of God’s people and His city (Dan. 9:1ff).
      - 2) The historical events of the seventy weeks announced in Daniel 9:24, are fleshed out in the chronological vision of the years between “the third year of Cyrus king of Persia” (533 B.C.) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) detailed in Daniel 10:1-12:4.
    3. In Dan. 12:1, the phrase, “And there shall be **a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time**” serves to both complete the chronology of the vision of the seventy weeks and to tie the event prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:1 to the destruction of Jerusalem.
      - a. Jesus will go on in the Olivet Discourse to describe it thus: “there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued” (Matt. 24:21).
      - b. Luke clearly states that the reference to Daniel is to be understood as the approach of the Roman army led by Titus to set siege to Jerusalem, “when you

see Jerusalem surrounded by armies... then recognize that her desolation is near... must flee to the mountains" (Luke 21:20-21).

- 1) Compare: "When you see the abomination of desolation" spoken of in Matthew 24:15 and "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies..." (Luke 21:20).
- 2) Both were intended to trigger the same response, "flee to the mountains" (Luke 21:21; Matt. 24:16).
4. The phrase "standing in the holy place" reflexively brings to mind intrusion into the temple. However, by the time Roman forces have breached the temple proper, it would be too late to escape. The reference at this point is best understood as the threat posed upon the holy city, Jerusalem, and its environs generally at the appearance and approach of a foreign army.
  - a. "The Roman armies are called the abomination of desolation because, being heathen armies, they were an abomination to the Jews, and because they brought desolation on the country." (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 207)
  - b. The protracted nature of the campaign against Jerusalem allowed the sustained presence of the Roman army in the region to both serve as a warning and provide a window of time for Matthew's future readers to understand and to react to the warning by fleeing Judea.
    - 1) "All the evidence, sacred and secular, points to the devastation visited on Judea by the Romans during "the Great Revolt" of A.D. 66-70 as the fulfillment of this prophecy... Enraged by a Greek pogrom in the Jewish quarter of Caesarea – about which the Roman authorities did nothing – militant Jews attacked and massacred the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. In response, Cestuis Gallus, the Roman legate in Syria, assembled a large force in Acre and marched on Jerusalem, but was routed by fierce resistance at the outskirts of the city." (Chumbley, 423)
    - 2) Consider Johnson's description of the Roman response to the Jewish "Great Revolt": "Rome then took charge and reacted with enormous force, no fewer than four legions, the V, X, XII and XV, being concentrated in Judea, and one of the empire's most experienced generals, Titus Flavius Vespasian, being given the command. **He took his time, leaving Jerusalem severely alone until he had cleared the coast and secured his communications**, reduced most of the fortresses held by Jews and settled the countryside. In 69 AD Vespasian was proclaimed emperor, and at the end of the year he left for Rome, leaving his eldest son, the twenty-nine-year-old Titus, in charge of **the final phase of the campaign, the siege and capture of Jerusalem, which lasted from April to September 70 AD.**" (Johnson, 137)
    - c. In this sense, understanding the phrase "standing in the holy place" to refer to the presence of a pagan, foreign army in Judea proper, echoes the language of Daniel 11:45. There the prophet is told of the approach of the "King of the North" from the direction of the Mediterranean, who would precipitate "a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time..." (Dan. 12:1).
      - 1) "He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain..." (Dan. 11:45)
  5. Flee to the mountains! (Matt. 24:16-22). Jesus next warned His followers and foretold potential hazards to flight "in those days" (24:19) when "there will be a great tribulation" (24:21). Jesus had definitively identified a sign that Matthew's future

readers would “see” and “understand” (24:15) as the time to “flee to the mountains” (24:16) and escape Judea and Jerusalem.

- a. Don’t let anything slow you down. The rooftop observer is encouraged not to go down and get anything out of the house. The farmer is not to return from the field to even grab his cloak.
  - b. The considerations mentioned here are jarringly practical and literal. It will be extremely challenging for an expecting mother to leave the city on foot and trek through the mountains. Similarly, what a terrible ordeal to undertake that flight with small children in tow.
  - c. The disciples, and Matthew’s future readers, were encouraged to pray that their flight out of Jerusalem would not be further complicated by having to be undertaken during the cold, wet winter season. Or, if local customs regarding travel and gate closures, etc. on the Jewish Sabbath present obstacles to flight for the faithful.
6. “Those **days**” are going to be worse than anything that ever happened. **“Days” (plural) becomes an important word in the context.** The plural “days” accurately describes and identifies the subject of this portion of the discourse as that protracted time period between the arrival of Roman forces in the region (24:15) and the city being encircled under siege.
- a. Those “days” would include the window to escape (24:16ff), potential perils for those trying to escape (24:19), and there would be unprecedented tribulation “then” (24:21). Siege warfare, by its nature and by design, cuts off supplies to a city for the purpose of starving its inhabitants into surrender. Mercifully, those “days” would be cut short “for the sake of the elect” (24:22).
  - b. Clarke on the tribulations: “Josephus says the houses were full of *women* and *children* that perished by the famine; and that the mothers snatched the food even out of their own children’s mouths.” (Clarke, 230)
  - c. Days (plural) is a clear contrast to “that day” (singular) referred to in verse 36.
7. Jesus then asserts, that if not for divine compassion, none would survive. Jesus is demonstrating divine compassion in answering the question of His followers and giving the future gospel readers divine warning (24:16). But that divine compassion for the elect had been long anticipated.
- a. It is possible, then, that the “elect” in verse 22 is comprised of Jews in Jerusalem and the language is a nod to the special relationship they had enjoyed with God (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 208).
  - b. But it is more likely a reference to Christians who heeded Matthew’s parenthetical warning, fled, and were spared, but would have been consumed if the Roman aggression had continued, spilling into surrounding areas until “no human being would be saved.” Jesus’ use of “elect” (24:31) would seem to align with the latter.
  - c. Recall from Daniel’s prophecy, “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time **your people shall be delivered**, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” (Dan. 12:1).
  - d. Adam Clarke, in his commentary, includes historical accounts of Christians (“those found written in the book”) remembering what Jesus had said and getting out when Titus’ army approached, “all who believed in Christ left Jerusalem and fled to Pella, and other places beyond the river Jordan; and so they all

marvelously escaped the general shipwreck of their country; not one of them perished.” (Clarke, 229)

B. False reports of my return (Matt. 24:23-27). Jesus prophesied and warned that the national upheaval that would naturally accompany the locally anticipated, impending, climactic fall of the Jewish holy city, would produce expectations, assumptions, and rumors of the Messiah’s personal, visible return, and even produce opportunistic imposters.

1. Jesus was clear in the proper response to those who would claim that His coming representatively in judgement against Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was to be understood as corresponding with His Second Coming. Do not believe them!
  - a. His instructions, effectively, are if anyone tries to tell you that I visibly, personally returned in A.D. 70, don’t believe it.
2. Because when I do come back (*parousia*), no one will have to be told...
  - a. “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (24:27).
    - 1) **Jesus here uses *parousia* literally to contrast** the obvious, unmistakable nature of His ultimate personal return with His “coming” in judgment against Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
      - a) “Certainly, all in Palestine in the first century would have seen the destruction of Jerusalem as a significant military conquest, however, the very fact what we debate whether it was Jesus’ “coming” or not shows that it was not. Morgan fittingly points out of Christ’s *parousia*, ‘it will be sudden and clear as the lightning’s flash, visible from east to west. Therefore all attempts to prove he has already come are not to be believed. So long as all do not know he has come, he has not come’ (261).”” (Pope, *Comm.*, 853)
    - 2) When the Lord returns at the end of time, no one will have to be told.
      - a) The Lord's Second Coming will be as visibly apparent as his ascension back into heaven was (Acts 1:11). He will be "revealed" (2 Thess. 1:7), or "appear" to all (2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:28).
      - b) His Second Coming will not be an event with merely local, nor even earthly impact (Rom. 14:10-11).
      - b. In His use of *parousia* here, Jesus corrects the disciples' misunderstanding embedded in their original questions. This contrast between the nature of His “coming” in judgment in A.D. 70 and His eventual, literal *parousia* enables His hearers to begin to understand them as two separate, distinct events.

C. This will be the end of the nation of Israel (Matt. 24:28). Jesus uses the imagery of a dead corpse to describe the end for Jerusalem, the Jewish nation, and the Mosaic system.

1. Once the Romans breach the walls of the city the horrendous suffering of the Jewish people would reach its crescendo, and the Jewish system would be no more. No temple, no more Levitical records, priesthood, temple services, sacrifices, etc.
2. “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” (24:28).
  - a. Vultures is probably best understood as a general reference back to those who would attempt to mislead during the days of tribulation and finds its antecedent in the “false Christs and false prophets” (24:24).
  - b. Alternate translations “the eagles will be gathered together...” (NKJV, KJV) brings to mind the imagery of the standards carried by the Roman legions that

would indeed gather and descend upon Jerusalem. While interesting, this understanding would not complete the warning that began in verse 24.

- c. Indeed, all that would remain of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Mosaic system would be a corpse. Josephus figures the dead at 1.1M, not counting those killed in other places. (Josephus, *Wars*, 6.9)

## VI. The Fall of Jerusalem: Execution of Divine Judgment upon Israel (24:29-31)

- A. “But **immediately after the tribulations of those days...**” provides an instant, almost frenetic transition from the siege of Jerusalem to the climactic fall of the city. To hear of the holy city surrounded is one thing, to hear that it has fallen and been razed is quite another.

1. “Immediately after the tribulations” of the siege was the breach of the walls and the utter destruction of the temple, the city, and the Mosaic system. The decreed judgment then becomes the executed judgment.
  2. And, noticeably, this transition (cf. “after that tribulation” - Mark 13:34) is marked by the introduction of apocalyptic language similar to words and images used throughout the Old Testament to describe God’s final judgment upon a nation.
- B. Simply allowing “immediately” (*euthéos*) to have its natural meaning in this place (Vine’s – “at once, straightway... is translated “forthwith” in A.V. – See IMMEDIATELY, PRESENTLY, STRAIGHTWAY” (Vine, 467) establishes the timing and thus the subject of this section as the climactic fall of the city.

1. In his commentary, Kyle Pope examines various alternatives on the meaning of “immediately” (856-858) and although he suggests that Jesus may not have used it this way in Matthew 24, he includes the following information that supports the most straightforward view: “Many understand *euthéos* to indicate a thing that happens in consecutive order after something else with no time interval in between. Chounard, for example, argues, ‘the term “immediately” (*euthéos*) does not lend itself to a long delay between the events described in verses 4-28 and that which is to occur in verses 29-31’ (428). Dan King contends the force of this word is such that to understand it to look ahead to final judgment one must ‘either ignore this word or assume Jesus was mistaken about it’ (“Perversions (2),” 370). Even premillennialist William K. Harrison suggests, ‘The interval between the end of the great tribulation and the heavenly signs is nil, as shown by the use of the word *immediately* in Matthew 24:29: (109).’” (Pope, *Comm.*, 856)
  2. Given the linkage of the phrase “the tribulation of those days” to the previous section (see VI. B.), the nature of the language introduced in this section (see VI. C.) and in deference to the time marker in verse 34 (“this generation will not pass away until all these things take place...”), there is no compelling reason to assign other than the most straightforward meaning to *euthéos*.
- C. Contextually, “**the tribulation of those days**” (24:29) seems to refer directly back to the distinct previous discussion of **the distress during the siege of Jerusalem** (24:15-22).

1. Recall it was “then” (24:21) during “**those days**” (24:19, 22, 22) that “there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

- D. Jesus’ language to describe the fall of Jerusalem echoes figurative prophetic language of God’s righteous judgment upon the nations.

1. “The culmination of the tribulation (vv 21-28) would be the fall of Jerusalem and the political-religious complex it represented. The language in vv 29-31 – darkened sun and moon, falling stars (11.23) – is apocalyptic (notes, v 1). Celestial phenomena were often used by the prophets to describe God’s historical judgments on cities and nations

(e.g., Isa. 13:10, Babylon; 34:4-6, Edom; Eze. 32:7, Egypt; Joel 2:30-31, Judah; also, Isa. 24:23, Jer. 4:23-28, Dan. 8:9-10, Acts 2:19-20, Rev. 6:12-13).” (Chumbley, 427-428)

2. The judgment of Babylon – Isaiah chapter thirteen begins, “The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw...” and goes on to include. “For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light” (Isa. 13:10).
3. The judgment of Egypt – Ezek. 32:7-8 “And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon will not give its light. ‘All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land,’ declares the Lord God.”
4. And even God’s judgment upon Judah – Joel 2:30-32 “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered...”
  - a. It is noteworthy that Peter quotes from Joel chapter two announcing its fulfillment beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:19-21).
    - 1) In announcing the arrival of the kingdom with power, Peter is proclaiming the beginning of the end of the Mosaic Age and the beginning of the new covenant under the Messiah.
5. “It was to be *immediately* after the tribulation of those days the sun would be darkened, the moon would fail to give light, and the stars would fall from heaven. If the sun, moon, and stars refer to the Jewish nation and its prerogatives, then we have seen the fulfillment of this prophecy. The Jewish nation has been darkened and no longer shines for God. This had been true ever since the tribulation of those days. God in His righteous wrath had removed the Jewish nation from His heavens. The Sun of Judaism has been darkened; as the moon it no longer reflects the Light of God; bright stars, as were the prophets, no longer shine in the Israel of the flesh.” (Kik, 65)
6. The use of figurative, cosmological language of 24:29-31 to describe the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 fits with the sequential flow of the discourse, demonstrates the significance of divine judgment upon Jerusalem, and aligns with the clear wording of verse 34, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”
7. If one understands Jesus to, at any point, switch the subject of His response to His Second Coming (*parousia*) then, there is no conflict with Jesus’ use of eschatological language later in this same discourse being understood as literal.

#### E. The sign of the Son of Man “coming” in judgment (Matt. 24:30)

1. Jesus tells His listeners that “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky” and then goes on to describe what they will “see”. The sign, then, is “the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.”
  - a. The verification that what Jesus is prophesying will come to pass is in the destruction of Jerusalem coming to pass. “The sign is not something preceding his appearing, but the appearing is itself the sign.” (McGarvey, *Comm.*, 211)
2. “The Son of man coming (not *parousia*) on the clouds” is to be understood in the sense of coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. Again, similar language can be found throughout the prophets and Matthew’s gospel referring to other than a visible, personal coming.
  - a. “The Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt.” (Isa. 19:1).

- b. Elsewhere in Matthew's gospel, Jesus uses similar language to describe events other than His personal, visible Second Coming:
- 1) Mt. 16:28: "... there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."
    - a) This is a parallel to Mark 9:1, a promise of the fulfillment of prophecy (Joel 2, Daniel 2, Isaiah 2) in the establishment of the church on Pentecost (Acts 2) in A.D. 33.
  - 2) Mt. 26:64: "... I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."
    - a) Though opinions vary, this warning of a future reversal of fortunes between Jesus and His Jewish "judges" seems to be pointing to "the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (24:30) during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- c. Stauffer: "Kept in the context of this discourse announcing the fall of Jerusalem, these words will be taken literally no more than the previous phrases. They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds is not in this setting to be taken literally any more than the sun, moon, and stars ceasing to shine or celestial bodies falling from the heavens. Jesus continued the prophetic symbols from Old Testament prophets. Isaiah, whose terminology Jesus employs, used similar language to prophesy of Jehovah's wrath against Egypt in ancient times. 'Behold, Jehovah rideth up on swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt' were Isaiah's exact words to describe God's presence at the destruction of that nation (see Isa. 19:1). So, Jesus, to whom the reins of heaven had been given, rode on a cloud of judgment unto Jerusalem in A.D. 70." (Stauffer, 323-324)
3. The news of the fall of Jerusalem would send a shockwave throughout Jewish communities dispersed across the Roman world. "The mourning of all the tribes likely refers to the lamentations of Jewish families [2.18] scattered throughout the Roman Empire, grieved because of the destruction of the temple and the terrible loss of kinsmen" (Paher, 141)
    - a. Kik states "we find ample justification for the fulfillment of the second clause of verse 30 at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. We know that there was deep mourning not only among the citizens of Jerusalem but among the Jews of the entire world when they learned that their beloved City and Temple were no more." (Kik, 73)
- F. The gathering of the "elect" (Matt. 24:31)
1. The language of gathering the elect need not force a conclusion that the reference here is to the Second Coming and final judgment.
  2. With organized Judaism removed as an obstacle to the spread of the kingdom, the immediate aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple cleared the way for the spread of the gospel message and growth of the eternal kingdom particularly from among the Gentile "nations."
    - a. Commenting on the parallel passage of Mark 13:27, Stauffer says this language "describes the providential work of God following the destruction of the wicked nation which had threatened, persecuted, and bound his chosen people, the church. His angels could be viewed as God's work through nations and men or by the actual "Messengers" (*angelos*) of God who being freed from the

persecuting power of Jerusalem went forth unhindered with the gospel to gather together his elect from among the nations. **Shall gather his elect from the four winds** envisions an unshackled church which can move throughout the corners of the world – to the four winds – to call men by the gospel unto Christ in whom they are elected, chosen, and adopted in God’s family (2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Eph. 1:4, 5).” (Stauffer, 324)

- b. “God’s elect are no longer the members of one nation, but a people drawn from all the corners of the earth... “Angels” (*aggelos*) likely refers to gospel preachers whose work would have the effect of a trumpet blast, calling men to salvation throughout the entire world.” (Chumbley, 429)

**VII. A local sign for a local event (24:32-33).** Jesus completes His answer to the disciples’ first question regarding the physical destruction of the temple (and therefore Jerusalem) by returning to the most distinguishing fact about that answer, clearly discernable signs.

A. These signs will be as discernable as the leaves on your fig trees

1. He had warned them about perceptible and worrisome world events that were **not** the sign of the end for the temple, signs that would not mark “the end” (24:6), as well as clear signs that would be accomplished before “the end will come” (24:14).
2. He then warned them of the unmistakable, unmissable sign of the arrival of a Roman army into the region as the recognizable sign of the imminent end for the temple.

B. And, just as clearly as fig leaves tell you it is summer...

1. When you see these signs, you can know “these things” are near.
2. The Roman army encompassing the city, the suffering, the emergence of false Christs and false prophets, the false claims of the Second Coming... “all these things” can be recognized and allow His followers to “**know**” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB) that judgment upon Jerusalem and the accompanying destruction of the temple is imminent.
  - a. Consider the contrast between Jesus’ use of “you know” (24:32) and “recognize” (24:33) with His later use of “no one knows” (24:36).

**VIII. The time marker (Matt. 24:34) and certainty of judgment (24:35)**

A. Jesus concludes His answer to the first question His followers had asked with a summarizing statement that provides a timeframe as well as an assurance of the certainty of His words. “Truly I say to you, **this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away**” (24:34-35). Both qualifying statements refer to “all these things” (24:34), confirming that everything that has been discussed so far will happen during this generation.

1. Again, within the normal lifespan of His listeners is the natural meaning of the phrase “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (24:34).
2. Kik says of verse 34, “We have called verse 34 the ‘time-text’ of the chapter. If the literal and well-defined meaning of this verse is accepted, it will be seen that this verse divides the chapter into two sections. Section One speaks of events which were to occur to the generation living at the time that Christ spoke these words. Section Two speaks of events to occur at the Second Coming of the Lord. Verse 34 is the division point of the two sections.” (Kik, 9)
3. It is noteworthy that this “time-text” appears in each synoptic account (cf. Mark 13:30-31; Luke 12:32-33) and provides an **inspired interpretive stake in the ground**. Here, “all these things” includes everything that Jesus has discussed (24:3-33). All these things were to happen within the normal lifespan of His hearers.

- a. While some portions of the discourse are admittedly difficult to interpret and understand, verse 34 is not.
- B. Perhaps to counter any Jewish hopes of a merciful deliverance from this destruction that has been declared, Jesus emphatically assures His audience that like in the days of Zedekiah, “there was no remedy” (cf. 2 Chron. 36:16). The destruction of Jerusalem is certain. It is as sure as His words.
  - 1. It should be noted that Jesus states directly here that “heaven and earth will pass away...” While not the main point, Jesus affirms the physical destruction of the present universe at the end of time.

#### IX. Now About Your Second Question (24:36ff)

- A. At verse 36, Jesus switches to discuss His Second Coming and the end of time. Knowing that the destruction of the temple and His Second Coming would comprise two distinct, separate events, and knowing that **His questioners had conflated the two events in their questions (24:3)**, Jesus had every reason to pivot from discussing the signs for when “these things” (destruction of the temple) would happen to discussing His Second Coming (*parousia*). There are several textual clues that identify the Lord’s change of subject.
  - 1. If, after verse 36, Jesus is discussing the same events He had discussed previously (24:15-35), there is an obvious, inconsistent, even confusing tension. It is illogical that the same event could be described in terms of “when you see all these things know” and “no one knows.”
    - a. Of Matthew 24:3-33, He said, “when you see all these things, recognize” (24:33).
    - b. The “coming” under discussion after verse 36 is spoken of thus, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (24:42).
  - 2. Jesus uses the word “days” (plural) when discussing the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (24:19, 22, and 29), but noticeably **switches to describing “that day” (singular) at verse 36**.
    - a. More precisely, Jesus transitions from the word “days” to the more specific “that day and hour” which continues throughout the discourse (24:36, 42, 44, 50 and 25:13).
    - b. That fits historically. Armies take time to move, to set up a siege and a siege by definition is a prolonged event. There would be a period of days during which the signs and sufferings would manifest themselves.
      - 1) The final siege lasted over 4 months, April to September A.D. 70.
    - c. But at 24:36, He switches to “of that day” (singular).
      - 1) A day with no warnings or signs (24:37).
    - d. The same break is perceptible in the parallel synoptic accounts:
      - 1) “But of **that day** or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mk. 13:32).
      - 2) Although less perceptible in Luke’s account, still in Luke 21:34-35, the disciples are warned to be “on guard... and **that day** (singular) will not come on you suddenly like a trap.”
  - 3. Jesus switches from a local example, blooming fig trees (24:32), to a universal example with universal impact.
    - a. Jesus now compares His Second Coming (*parousia*) to the great flood: “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days

before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (24:37-39).

- b. Prior to this second “coming”, Jesus describes people going on with the normal routines of life. Not at all consistent with His warning or the realities of the days of tribulation of a people trapped within the walls of a doomed city.
4. And that day “will come upon all those who dwell **on the face of all the earth**” (Luke 21:35), not just those that dwell in and around Jerusalem.
- X. The remainder of the discourse supports a pivot at verse 36 from discussing the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) to discussing His Second Coming, final judgment, and the end of time (24:37ff).
- A. Examples of being overtaken by an event with no warning (24:37-51).
- 1. Noah: A global example for a global event (24:37-39).
  - 2. People going about their normal routines (24:40-41).
    - a. The phrase, “one will be taken, and one will be left” does not support the premillennialist view of the “Rapture.” Since at the Second Coming all will be raised, the contrast likely distinguishes between the prepared who will come forth to a “resurrection of life” and the unprepared who will come forth to a “resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).
  - 3. The thief in the night (24:42-44).
    - a. Jesus introduces the “thief in the night” language (24:43) that both Peter (2 Pet. 3:10) and Paul (1 Thess. 5:2) use in reference to His Second Coming and the end of the world:
      - 1) “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” (1 Thess. 5:2).
      - 2) “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away...” (2 Pet. 3:10).
  - 4. The Master’s return (24:45-51).
    - a. Notice His use of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (24:51). “This makes it clear that Jesus was not speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, but the punishment of hell assigned to the wicked upon the final *parousia* or “coming” of Jesus on the Day of Judgment.” (Pope, *Comm.*, 880)
- B. These are followed by parables about being ready for a reckoning:
- 1. The Ten Virgins (25:1-13).
  - 2. The Talents (25:14-30).
- C. And finally, Jesus concludes with the scene of final judgment (25:31-46).
- 1. “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory” (24:31) in contrast to the “coming” at A.D. 70.

### **Conclusion:**

- I. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus addresses both the destruction of Jerusalem and His Second Coming. Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Matt. 24:1-35) and then His Second Coming at the end of time (Matt. 24:36-26:1).

- A. His disciples had, albeit confusedly, asked about both.
  - B. His answer corrected their flawed premise that the physical destruction of the temple would occur simultaneously with the end of the world, when Jesus returned in final judgment.
- II. The immediate setting of the discussion (time, place, and Jesus' preceding declaration); the use of *parousia*; "end of the age"; "days" vs. "day"; the clear contrast between an escapable event with anticipated, perceptible, local signs, and a universal event with no warning; as well as clear time markers provide a logical, sequential framework for the Olivet Discourse.
- III. There are four questions that I believe are helpful in evaluating an interpretation of any passage.
- A. Consider the following with regard to any biblical interpretation or position:
    1. Is it logical?
    2. Is it consistent with the rest of the book?
    3. Is it consistent with parallel passages?
    4. Is it consistent with the rest of scripture?
  - B. Using these four questions, I believe my interpretation of Matthew 24 is:
    1. Logical, as it resolves the clear tension between "when you see, flee" and "no one knows."
    2. Consistent in usage of "end of the age" with the rest of the book of Matthew.
    3. Consistent in usage of "day" with Mark and Luke parallel passages.
    4. Consistent in usage of "thief in the night" with the rest of scripture.
- IV. In His answer, Jesus corrected His followers' mistaken conflation of the destruction of the temple with His Second Coming. He warned them of false signs that would occur in the decades between this exchange and the Roman move on Jerusalem. He shared the warning sign, tribulations and suffering that would accompany the siege of the holy city and foretold the climactic impact of its eventual fall. But ultimately, He elevated their thinking. He replaced their immediate concern over the future destruction of a physical structure with a mindset that would and will sustain believers until final judgment at His Second Coming, "Therefore, be on alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (24:42).
- V. Matthew 24 is a controversial passage that raises many important doctrinal questions. It is important that we rightly divide Matthew 24.

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