

# MATTHEW 24

## A Preterist Interpretation

*There shall not be left here one stone upon another- Jesus*



**B r o o k y R S t o c k t o n**

# Matthew 24

Version 2.0



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# Table of Contents

<b>MATTHEW 24</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>A Preterist Interpretation</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Introduction .....	6
Matthew 24 .....	6
Destruction of the Temple.....	9
Matthew 24:1-27 .....	9
Birth Pains .....	12
Matthew 24:4-26.....	12
The Appearance of the Son of Man.....	20
Matthew 24:27-35 .....	20
As the Days of Noah .....	34
Matthew 24:36-51 .....	34
<b>Primary Sources</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Publications</b> .....	<b>40</b>

# Preface

In 1986 I received a booklet in the mail, “88 Reasons Why Christ has to Return by 1988” by Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA Engineer – a mathematician who was not a theologian.

Whisenant mailed 300,000 free copies of the booklet to ministers across the United States and sold 4.5 million copies in bookstores. Rapture books sell millions even though they fail scholarship standards.

Whisenant was wrong. It didn’t happen.

Because I didn’t want to be pushed around by blow hard eschatology buffs, I decided to do my doctoral work in the field of eschatology. The endeavor forced me to exegete every major passage in the Bible that appeared to be about the “second-coming of Christ.”

I discovered that many passages didn’t teach what prophecy teachers proposed. One of those passages was Matthew 24. I discovered the Lord’s message in Matthew 24 to be more about the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. than it did about an “end of the world” event. Old commentaries saw it as proof of claim that our Lord was in authority at the right hand of the Father.

If you are confused about eschatology and what lies ahead, you are not alone. End-time event books are big money publications. This is not the case here.

Accepting a Preterist’s interpretation on Matthew 24 does **not** mean that one has to interpret every prophetic passage in the same way.

I trust the Lord will use this “interpretation” to shed light and not heat. The future is in his hands. Therefore, we can rest. The Lord is coming, but I am content not to know when.

Brooky Stockton, ret. professor of theology.

Part 1

# A Preterist Interpretation

Of Matthew 24



# Introduction

## Matthew 24

### The Issues

Historically, Matthew twenty-four was understood to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. But, in recent times, the chapter has been used to predict the second-coming of Christ to the exclusion of its historical context and direct references the temple. A doomsday mentality fills the air waves. Every time something awful happens in the Middle East, Futurists announce that the "birth pains" are upon us. Many Christians, believing the end is near, head for the mountains. Randy Weaver and the horrible events of Ruby Ridge (1992) comes to mind.

The doomsday prophets take the entire passage as applying to some proposed tribulation period before the second-coming of Christ. They interpret the entire passage Futuristically. No doubt the Zionist takeover of Palestine in 1948 fueled the Futurist interpretation. The student would do well to understand Zionism, the Ashkenazi origin of modern "Jews, who are not" and their political ambitions. Modern claims by Zionists in Palestine are no different than Chinese Moslems claiming they have a right to occupy Mecca.

The Preterists, on the other hand, have reacted to the Futurists and argue the entire passage applies to the events of 70 AD. Partial Preterists find a middle road and assert that it teaches both. Historists who are not committed to a particular eschatology interpret the passage in light of destruction of Jerusalem in the first century. And, this is the approach taken here.

There are three rules for interpretation every Bible student would do well to remember: context, context, context.

### Background

Daniel promised seventy weeks to complete the will of God for national Israel and to end their lawlessness and rebellion against Him. When Christ came, the Jews rejected their Messiah. Forthwith, Jesus predicted the destruction of the nation confirming God's answer to Daniel.

Matthew 24, therefore, is about the destruction of Jerusalem as predicted by Daniel and explained by Christ. However, this interpretation does not

nullify other promises regarding the return of Christ. Rather, the ruination of Jerusalem by Titus provides proof of claim that our Lord's prediction was true and correct. That He would rise from the dead and destroy His enemies.

Because apostate Israel rebelled against God's law-order, the LORD promised to destroy his unbelieving people in Isaiah 65: 1, 3, 12, 13, 15.

In Matthew 21:33-43, our Lord ordered, "Destroy those wicked men (husbandmen or Jews)". He stated the kingdom of God will be taken away from "you." The "you" refers to "the builders" (v. 42), "the wretches" (v. 41), and "the tenants" (v. 40). The "ax laid a the tree" (Luke 3:9) is the destruction of Jerusalem. Our Lord said the "kingdom of God" will be taken from you (the Jews) and given to another nation (true believers) that will produce fruit (1 Peter 2:9). We know now that stewardship of the kingdom Gospel was taken away from unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Jews and given to the church, the true candlestick, composed of believers from among the nations.

In Matthew 22:7 we have an illustration of the king sending his army to *destroy those "murderers" and "burn their city."* We now know the king is King Jesus; the murderers were the rebel Jews during the Jewish War; and, the "city" was Jerusalem.

In Matthew 23, seven woes are pronounced against Israel's leaders. Jesus promised consummate judgment on the misdeeds of Jewish leaders from Abel to Zechariah, and that this judgment would come *upon "this generation"* (23:35), a reference to the Jews who rejected Christ circa 30-70 AD.

In Matthew 23:38, Jesus said, "Behold your house (nation) is left to you desolate." The word "desolate" is *eremos* meaning "wilderness" or "desert" or "desolation."

However, it is a textual variant. Aland gives it a B rating. Copyists might have been influenced by Jeremiah 22:5 to include "desolate." The verb, "*aphiemi*" (pres., pass., ind.) means to "forsake," "let alone," or "leave" meaning "your house is forsaken." The word "house" could either refer to the nation, Jerusalem, or the temple.

Books have been written on Matthew 24, and it is not necessary to write another one. The following commentary, however, is a brief, crisp explanation of the interpretive issues explaining why Matthew 24 should

be interpreted historically rather than Futuristically. The following explanation relies heavily upon John Bray's research (1996), Matthew 24 Fulfilled and Adam Clarke's Commentary (1810-1826) having no knowledge of dispensationalism or of the modern state of "Israel."



## Part I

# Destruction of the Temple

## or End of the World?

### Matthew 24:1-27

#### Announcement of the Destruction of Herod's Temple

24:1-2 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

*And:* The “and” (kai) connects chapter 24 to chapter 23.

*Temple:* Jesus predicts the destruction of the third temple. Origen and Eusebius said Matthew was the first of the four gospels. Possibly, John did not write about the destruction of Jerusalem because it had already occurred; or, because he saw more clearly than any other that Jesus was the true temple whom the Jews rejected.

*Not one stone:* And Jesus said unto them, “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” *Jesus announced the destruction of Jewish temple.*

*Left:* The word “left” is the same word as “left” in 23:38.

As Jesus left the temple complex, he informed the disciples that that Herod's temple was going to be demolished. How can it be denied that Jesus was referring to anything but the Herodian temple? Christ was not talking about some unconstructed, presumptive temple two-thousands years removed from the time of the disciples, but the temple stones still standing at that hour. The announcement that that their beloved temple was scheduled for demolition must have sent shivers up and down the spine of the disciples that day.

Furthermore, if you believe the temple that Jesus was discussing was anything but Herod's temple, you must also believe that Jesus intentionally mislead the disciples by referring to an alleged event two-thousand years plus removed from them. Hummm?

**2-3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?**

Stunned by the Lord's announcement, the disciples wanted to know the details. Some think two questions were asked, "(a) When shall the temple be destroyed, and (b) what shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age. However, only one question was on their minds: When will the temple be destroyed? Quite possibly, the disciples *wrongly connected* the destruction of the temple with the end of the world or they might have been thinking about the end of the Jewish age [\[1\]](#).

Mark and Luke only record the question regarding the timing of the destruction of the temple. There is no reference to the sign of His coming by the other synoptic authors (cf. Mark 13:1ff; Luke 21:10ff).

**Age:** The word "age" (aeon) usually refers to the end of "this present evil age," the time from Adam till the establishment of God's kingdom (13:38-40). The disciples were thinking that the destruction of the temple marked the end of the Jewish age . . . not the end of the world.

**When:** The key question is "when" (pote) shall (future tense) these things happen?

**Coming**[\[2\]](#): The word "coming" could mean "presence" or "arrival" and appears to be unassociated with *our modern concept* of the second-coming. The disciples knew nothing of a second-coming at this time.

Bray (page 17, 18) says the promise of seeing his "coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28, Mt. 91) refers not to the transfiguration, but to his arrival to judge Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Others teach his coming refers to the transfiguration.

Bray denies this saying the reference that some should not die "within six days" as referring to the transfiguration appears extraneous. Therefore, Bray interprets 16:28 as referring to his coming in 70 AD to destroy the nation.

It is very possible we error in crediting the disciples with having a perfected theology of a second-coming of our Lord. At the time of this discourse, the disciples were growing theologians, not doctors of theology, They didn't even understand that Christ was going to die, much less return a second time like modern Christians associate with the Parousia. To the disciples, the destruction of the temple would terminate the present age and inaugurate the Age to Come or the Messianic Age (Luke 20:33-36). Let us not error by attributing too much knowledge to the disciples.

Remember, the disciples had not yet read The Late Great Planet Earth, nor were they influenced by modern eschatological schemes.

Josephus (1980, Complete Works of Flavius, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. v.1, p. 473) records Titus giving orders to dig up the temple to the foundations. Its destruction was complete. This would have fulfilled Micah 3:12, "Jerusalem shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become a heap." Luke 19:43-44 says, "They shall not leave one stone upon another."

F.F. Bruce states the Romans captured Fortress Antonio on July 24. Twelve days later the temple sacrifice ceased. On August 27 the temple gates were burned. The temple was destroyed on September 8. By September 26, the whole city was in the hands of Titus (cited by Bray, p. 15).

## Part III

# Birth Pains

## Preceding the Destruction of the Temple

### Matthew 24:4-26

**4-5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.**

Deception is a common problem among Christians. And, the wretched thing about deception is the misled do not know they are deluded.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

*Them:* This refers to Jesus' twelve disciples, not to Christians of our day.

*Deceive you:* This does not refer to our own time. It refers to the Jewish deceivers existing prior to 70 A.D.

Consider the following examples of imposters in the first century : Simon (Acts 8:9-10), Simon Magnus (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), Dositheus the Samaritan, Theudas (Josephus, Eusebius, Gamaliel – Acts 5:36), Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), the Judaizers (Galatians 5; Philippians 3:1-4) and the “antichrists” of 1 John 2:18 and Revelation 2:9 and 3:9.

**6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.**

Again, "rumors of wars" does not refer to political forecasts at CNN, CBS, NBC, and Fox News. It refers to the events prior to 70 AD. Rome ruled the Mediterranean world, and rumors were always grinding their way through the rumor mill about a rebellion where Rome would declare martial law to squash the revolt militarily.

Consider the following examples of wars prior to 70 AD (Josephus): In one eighteen month period, Rome had four different emperors: Nero, Galba, Otho and Vitellius. In Alexandria, 50,000 Jews were slaughtered. In Damascus, 10,000 lost their lives. Each came to a violent death. An uprising in Alexandria resulted in the slaughter of 50,000 Jews. In Damascus 10,000 Jews were reported to have been massacred. Another

50,000 were slain in Selucia. In the battle of Caesarea between the Syrians and the Jews, 20,000 Jews died and many villages were divided. Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the Jerusalem Temple. Though the Jews did not permit it, they feared retribution from Rome if they resisted (Josephus: Bray, p. 28).

**7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.**

*Nation against nation* and *kingdom against kingdom* refers to political clashes, disputes, revolts, coups, and even war.

*Famines:* The most famous famine was the famine during the life of Josephus. Eusebius mentioned the great famine in Judah which forced the Jews to buy corn from Egypt (p. 85). In the first year of Claudius, a famine broke out in Italy. Tacitus mentions the famine in the 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> year of Claudius. Renan reported a famine in Rome in 68 AD under Nero (p. 194, Bray, p. 29).

*Pestilence:* In AD 40, Jews suffered in Babylon. In AD 60, Rome experienced death from an outbreak of disease. Josephus mentioned a pestilence in Niger (Newton, p. 378; Bray p. 29).

*Earthquakes:* In the generation of the Apostles, before 70 AD, great earthquakes were recorded in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, Campania, Rome, Judea, as well as a particularly deadly one in Pompeii in 63 AD. Robert Hooke in his Discourses on Earthquakes wrote that over 700 major natural catastrophes had taken place in one century alone (see Bray, p. 29).

Modern history shows us that famine is still with us today. There was the great famine of Northwest China from 1928 to 1929 where over three million died. In the USSR from 1932 to 1934 over five million died from a famine. Again China suffered a famine in 1943 which killed nearly eight million people. The great Nigerian famine which lasted from 1967 to 1974 took the lives of nearly three million. With the rise of the science of modern seismology, seismic waves are recorded on a daily basis. Earthquakes are weekly news around the globe. To say that a great famine or earthquakes are a unique sign of the end of the world is both to ignore the history of the world. Further, Jesus said these are "signs." They do not mean the end had come (Matthew 24:6-8).

## **8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.**

*The beginning of sorrows* refers to the destruction of 70 AD, not to the political troubles during own time. Jewish sorrows began in the spring of 63 AD over taxation. Hostilities grew until Nero sanctioned a general persecution against Jews. After the Jews stopped paying taxes (65 AD), Nero declared war against Jerusalem in 67 AD.

The beginning of sorrows in 63 AD was nothing to be compared to the crushing blows on Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. The disciples were not to think the end had come when they heard about the precursory events that plagued the nation prior to its destruction. Most disciples were alive in 63 AD, but by 70 AD all the disciples but John had died.

## **9-10 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.**

The "*you*" here refers to the apostles (Acts 4, 6, 16, 18, 24, 25). James was executed in Acts 12. Peter was arrested at the same time and almost executed. Paul received five beatings of 39 stripes. Eventually, Peter and Paul were executed under Nero before the destruction of Jerusalem around 67-68 AD.

The death of John the Baptist was still fresh in the memory of the disciples. The book of Acts reports that persecutions continued against the early church in the time of the Apostles well after the death of our Lord. The leaders of the church were arrested, threatened, and arrested again. Stephen was stoned to death. Saul of Tarsus hunted down Christians to have them jailed and put to death. Herod had James executed by the sword. Eventually, Paul was mobbed, stoned and left for dead. He was arrested on obviously false charges in Jerusalem, survived plots against his life, twice sent to Rome as a prisoner, and it is believed that he was executed for his faith under Nero. Paul was betrayed by Alexander and Demas (2 Timothy 4). All the Apostles along with many believers experienced tortures and violent deaths during this same time period.

## **11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.**

Paul spoke of false prophets and pseudo apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; Acts 13:6). Peter spoke of false teachers (2 Peter 2). Jude

records the fight against false teachers and found it necessary to exhort the Christians to contend for the faith (3). But, it is also true, that the spirit of apostasy that was present in Paul's day, will be pandemic before the return of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Apostasy is a mark of the end times, but who is qualified to identify its *terminus a quo* in history?

**12-13 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.**

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

***Iniquity:*** The word "iniquity" is *anomia* or lawlessness. Because men rebelled against God's law, love experienced an arctic winter. Some men deserted the faith; others corrupted it.

***Endure to the end:*** The difficulties at the end would test the faith of everyone in the region. Those that endured these terrible times by obeying Christ without growing cold or apostatizing would be saved from the Roman invasion.

***Shall be saved:*** This refers to being safe from execution during the Jewish War at the hands of the Romans during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Not one Christian was found in Jerusalem in 70 AD reports Bray (p. 32). Further, the want of compassion by the rebels was nothing short of stunning. The rebels killed, starved, tortured, and assassinated more of their own people than did the Romans. These Jewish madmen even burned the temple granary.

**14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.**

***The gospel of the kingdom*** is the gospel message of Messianic salvation. It is the Christian gospel initiated by Peter and expounded by Paul that God's rule has entered history to defeat man's enemies and to bring men under the blessings of the messianic age in advance of its consummation in history.

***Preached in all the world:*** This refers to the gospel proclamation by the disciples during the first century which did go into the entire Roman world during their lifetime (Romans 1:8; 10:18; 16:25-26).

***World:*** The word "world" is *oikoumene* meaning *inhabited regions of Roman civilization*. To the Romans, it was the Roman Empire. To the Greeks, it meant the world of 'koine' Greek. To the Jew it meant the Holy Land.

Luke 2:1, Luke refers to “all the world” and this alludes to the Roman Empire.

## The Abomination of Desolation

**15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)**

*Ye*: The word “ye” refers to the twelve disciples.

*Abomination*: The “abomination of desolation” does not refer to some supposed antichrist in a supposed future war regarding modern carnal Jerusalem facing Magog. Daniel 9 is called the “Swamp of Old Testament Criticism” and to insist the passage applies to a distant future generation 2600 years into the future reflects fantastic theological imagination, a reading into the text what is not there. It is an abuse of Daniel 9:24-27. In Daniel nine, the term “abomination” refers to the radical rebellion of Jews against Christ and desecration of law caused by the rebels leading to the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem.

Moreover, the term “abomination” must be interpreted in light of Luke 21:20 which is identified as the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem. We must allow Daniel and Luke, not modern Futuristic speculation to rule this passage.

Luke 21:20 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with (Roman) armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

Interpretive presentation of Daniel 9:27 And he (*Christ*) shall confirm the covenant (*make a strong, new covenant*) with many for one week and in the midst of the week (*circa 27-34 AD*): he (*Christ*) shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease (*By virtue of His death*), and for the overspreading (*wings or extremes*) of abominations (*the rejection of Christ and the sacrilege by John, Simon, and Eleazar for control of Jerusalem in 70 AD*) he (*Christ*) shall make it desolate (*destruction of Jerusalem*), even until the consummation (*70 AD*), and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (*Jewish rebels leading the revolt in 70 AD*).

Further, there is an abomination mentioned by Daniel in chapter eleven and twelve which was fulfilled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Maccabees 1:59) in 167 AD. This was one attempt to paganize the



temple. Further, Jesus cleansed the temple of merchants who desecrated His Father's house in John 2. Many other attempts to profane the temple came through Herod and Romans before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Gessius Flores, short of money, ordered the confiscation of gold from the temple in Jerusalem. Nonplused, the Jewish jokers "passed the hat" for "that poor procurator Florus" (livius.org.). Drunken and corrupt Jews desecrated the temple according to Bray prior to the complete destruction of the temple.

## The Great Tribulation

### 16-20 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:

Let him which is on the housetop **not** come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day:

*Them:* The word "them" refers to the residents of Jerusalem. Some disciples and their converts lived to see this destruction from afar.

*Judaea* refers to a very specific locale—the Judaea the disciples knew and loved. This is very local language which should **not** be forsaken or spiritualized as a reference to some general, unknown future global tribulation two-thousand years removed from this historical crisis. The *near interpretation* is always preferred above a *distant interpretation* as long as there is evidence in the context.

Josephus reports that General Cestius first came to Jerusalem with his armies and then retreated (October 15-22 in 66 AD). The destruction of Jerusalem took place during his second siege (Bray, p. 57). His first appearance was the warning for Jews to flee as spoken by Jesus. The church in Jerusalem, believing the words of Jesus, fled to Pella in Peraea in 68 AD (Bray, p. 58). There is a reason to believe not one Christian perished during the Roman siege.

*21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

*Great tribulation:* What is the "great tribulation?" Was it some alleged end-time seven-year global tribulation connected with dispensational eschatology or was it the tribulation caused by the Jewish Revolt and

Roman vengeance circa 63-72 AD? No, the “great tribulation” of Matthew 24 is the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In Revelation 7, “the great tribulation” is death and not some future global catastrophic event.

*Then:* The word “*then*” refers to the great tribulation of 70 AD—not to some future tribulation. The adverb “then” (tote') indicates a near connection to the birth pains gripping the nation, not a far, distant prediction. Jesus said this time would be “days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22-23). The tribulation is the madness of Jewish leaders against their own people and the Roman siege on Jerusalem. This tribulation is the “wrath” mentioned by Paul to the Thessalonians that would come on the Jews “to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

Luke says this was the time of fulfillment (21:22); i.e., all prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem in the Old Testament (OT) were fulfilled in 70 AD.

This passage does not refer to a future tribulation, but to the terrible destruction in 70 AD. Nero starting persecuting Jews in 63 AD and Christians in 64 AD. Jews stopped paying taxes and rebelled against Rome in 65 AD. The first stage of war began in October 15-22, AD 66 under Cestius Gallus. Cestius did not wage war in order to win and was forced to retreat in November of that year. The next year Nero sent Vespasian to Judaea to stop the rebellion. It took three years and six months for Jerusalem to fall (August 10, 70 AD - September 8, AD). Much of Judah was ravished before the Romans even reached Jerusalem. Could this refer to the 42 months of Revelation 11:2 where Gentiles tread the outer court? Bray thinks so (Bray, p. 69).

Reading the lengthy, detailed account of the destruction of Jerusalem by Josephus is like reading a blow-by-blow account of some deadly gladiator contest. Thousands perished by sword, famine, disease, assassination, and mercy killing during the Roman siege. Those who tried to escape over the wall were captured by the Romans, stripped naked, and crucified on crosses after taking down the body of a previous victim. Josephus records nearly three million Jews fled to Jerusalem during the Passover and were literally caged in by the Romans. Bodies were piled in the street. The stench was enough to cause asphyxia. Those teenage Jews (90,000) who survived were marched toward Rome and either crucified on the way, sacrificed to the lions, or sold into slavery in Rome. Clement of Alexandria (153 AD), Chrysostom (347 AD), St. Augustine (354 AD),

Abbot Sulpitius Severus (363 AD) all reference the “abomination” as the armies of Rome (Bray, p. 50-52).

**22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.**

*Days shortened:* Josephus said conditions inside the city were so terrible that children took food out of the mouths of fathers, mothers took food from their babies, and wicked men tortured the weak to discover where food was hidden. Torments included driving stakes up their “fundaments” in order to extract truth about provisions. Josephus said no city ever suffered such wickedness and miseries in history. Between April 14<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup> a 115,880 corpses were taken out of the city through one gate, not including other gates, or corpses were thrown over the wall (Bray, p. 106).

*The Elect:* The "elect" refers to believers in Christ (Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4).

## **False Messiahs**

**23-26 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.**

*False Christs:* These are different than antichrists. Jesus corrects the thinking of the disciples at this point in his discourse. Some among the twelve might think the destruction of Jerusalem would herald the Messiah’s coming. This could be Jesus’ corrective according to Robert Reymond (1998, p. 1003).

Josephus reported a false prophet in Jerusalem who urged the people to get into the temple area and wait for the Messiah to appear. John (1 John 4:1) said many false Christ were in the world during his day. John Gill reported that Simon, the son of Giora, collected together many thousands in the mountains and desert parts of Judaea (Bray, p. 104).

During the siege, Jews created secret places in the temple and in and around Jerusalem to pray and consult the dead.

## Part IV

# The Appearance of the Son of Man

### Matthew 24:27-35

27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

This passage marks a break in the discourse.

*Lightening cometh out of the east:* This is dramatic, cataclysmic language germane to the genre of apocalyptic literature. It is **not** literal, but it does communicate literal, dynamic action.

*Son of Man:* The apocalyptic Son of Man takes us back to Daniel 7:13 and the judicial and executive authority given Jesus to exercise dominion and judgment.

*Coming of the Son of Man:* The word *Parousia* may refer to our Lord's presence or arrival, not necessarily His second-coming (Bray). Only Matthew uses the word *Parousia* in reference to the events of 70 AD. Mark and Luke do not.

To Bray, Christ can come and not be seen. He came in 70 AD, but was unseen. God spoke of a coming down to judge the Egyptians (Exodus 3:8). Jesus "appeared" to Paul, but Paul's companions never saw the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:17). Paul heard but saw no man (Acts 9:7). Christ promised to come to the seven churches in Revelation. This was not His 2nd-coming *Parousia*, but a special visitation by the risen Christ in session at the right hand of God to assist, aide, reward, or judge His church. And, we pray that our Lord will come to our aid and assistance, now in this life, but by this we are not referring to the His second-coming *Parousia* (Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 9, 10, 11, 20)

Bray (p. 107) interprets the "lightening cometh" as Jesus universal presence versus the localized presence of false messiahs. This is Jesus coming with thundering judgment in 70 AD. However, as lightening announces a storm, Jesus may be comparing His judgment on Jerusalem to

that of a lightning storm. This verbiage is not literal; rather, it is highly apocalyptic, metaphorical language:

Isaiah 30:27, 30 - Apocalyptic language such as *lightening, flaming fire, and hailstones* was used by Isaiah to stir the imagination of judgment possibilities.

Zechariah 9:14 - There is an apocalyptic reference to *lightening, a trumpet, and a whirlwind* in this passage.

John Gill (1720-1771) says this is not the Last Judgment, but the Lord's coming in judgment upon the nation of Israel (Bray, p. 110).

Adam Clarke agrees saying this is a reference to the Jerusalem and the "destruction of the Jewish polity."

Lightfoot (1859) says this is Christ taking vengeance on that exceeding wicked nation and is therefore called his "coming in glory" (Bray, p. 110).

Reymond has a different slant. He says Jesus now separates the events, the destruction of Jerusalem from his second-coming, which the disciples had united in their minds. *This is a corrective.* He wants the disciples to know the two events are not connected. Jerusalem's destruction will not usher in the Parousia of Christ. His second-coming will be more conspicuous.

The context demands this "coming" be separated from the Second-coming where we are told the Lord shall descend from heaven in bodily form to meet the resurrected and the living saints in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**28 For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.**

Luke puts this statement after the reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:37).

*Carcass*: The word "*carcass*" could be a reference to Jeremiah 7:33-44 signifying *people*, or it could be a reference to Jeremiah 19:3, 7 which sees the bodies of unbelieving Jewish people as meat for the birds. Josephus says that Jerusalem was so full of corpses that soldiers stumbled over rows of dead bodies in their fighting to gain control of the temple. Sometimes they were stacked three to four feet high in the streets.

Adam Clarke says the carcass is "The Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead."

*Eagles* can be translated *vultures* or birds of prey. The Chaldeans were called "eagles" in Habakkuk 1:6, 8. Cyrus was called a bird of prey in Isaiah 46:10-11. In Hosea 8:1, God is called an eagle coming against the house of the Lord. God called Nebuchadnezzar a servant of destruction (Jeremiah 25:9). John Peter Lange says the eagles are the Roman armies. Albert Barnes Commentary sees the eagles as Roman armies (Bray, p. 115). The Roman symbol on their shields was an eagle. Adam Clarke says the eagles are a reference to the Roman ensigns on the tops of their ensign-staves.

## The Sign of the Son of Man

**29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:**

*This is a difficult section for the Futurist or partial Preterist.*

The Futurist sees this section as referring to the Lord's second-coming and the end of the world. But, the Futurist must deal with the word "immediately." If the first part of this passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the next part refers to the second-coming, then all are disappointed because the Lord did not come after this period.

If verses 1-28 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but verses 29-31 refer to the end of the world, how does the partial Preterist or Futurist manage the term "immediately?" How? In his mind, he automatically inserts 2000 years plus between these two verses. To be consistent, the Futurist must insist the whole or part of verses 1-28 refer to an end-time tribulation. But, this doesn't fit the disciples' question or the Lord's statement about the destruction of the temple.

Furthermore, the Futurists have difficulty with this passage because they interpret these words literally. The Futurists contend this passage refers to a literal, physical, material second-coming of Christ --at that time the stars will literally collapse or cease to give their light. If they take this literally, there will be no starlight during the millennium in their theological construct.

The Preterist, on the other hand, has no problem with the word "immediately." He believes verses 29-31 refer to our Lord coming in judgment upon the Jews in 70 AD.

*The Preterist's problem*, on the other hand, is the dynamic language following the word “immediately” which appears to address our Lord’s Parousia at the end of history.

How does a Preterist interpret the following section? [Note: This author seldom agrees with Preterists' interpretations on other passages in the New Testament, but here their reasoning makes sense.]

***Immediately:*** The word “immediately” demonstrates that what follows is closely associated with the previous events. To insert 2000 years between verse 28 and verse 29 is not congruent with the term “immediately.” It is non sequitur. The word “immediately” is *eutheos*, a continuance participle, *meaning now, at once, or soon*. It is impossible to insert 2000 years between verse 28 and verse 29 and maintain interpretive integrity.

***Those days:*** this refers to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD by Titus. It is difficult to associate “those days” with a future time if verses 1-28 refer to the events during 70 AD. Remember, if verses 1-28 do not refer to the second-coming of Christ but to the destruction of Jerusalem, the phrase “those days” must also refer to the demolition of the capital city in 70 AD.

The tribulation does not refer to some future seven-year tribulation period, but to the “great affliction” during the event of 70 AD.

***Sun, moon, stars:*** This is apocalyptic language, not literal Jesus is not being literal here. The Sun, Moon, and stars would not literally fall out of the sky. Rather, it is hyperbole stressing the dramatic end of the Jewish hope. For the Sun not to shine, and the Moon not to give her light, and the stars to fall refer to the utter collapse of Jewish civilization, which happened in August-September of 70 AD.

In ancient literature, hieroglyphics, the terms “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” often represents states, kings, and queens. Jesus is dealing with a political catastrophe, not a natural, stellar catastrophe.

The language of Matthew is consistent with the language of Psalm 18. God’s deliverance to David was dynamic and cataclysmic. Note the apocalyptic language used to describe God’s work on behalf of him. The psalmist (David) uses symbolic language, not literal language to describe his deliverance by YHWH.

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his

ears. Then *the earth shook and trembled*; the foundations also of *the hills moved* and were shaken, because he was wroth.

There went up *a smoke out of his nostrils*, and *fire out of his mouth* devoured: coals were kindled by it. He *bowed the heavens* also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.”

“He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were *dark waters and thick clouds of the skies*. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The LORD also *thundered in the heavens*, and the Highest gave his voice; *hail stones and coals of fire*. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out *lightnings*, and discomfited them. Then the *channels of waters* were seen, and the *foundations of the world* were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.”

The language of Matthew is consistent with Isaiah’s apocalyptic language describing the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 13:9, 10). When Babylon fell, the Sun ceased to shine for that nation – not literally, but politically and emotionally.

“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the *stars of heaven* and the *constellations* thereof shall not give their light: *the Sun* shall be darkened in his going forth, and *the Moon* shall not cause her light to shine.”

The language of Matthew is consistent with a judgment on Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7, 8).

“And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the *stars* thereof dark; I will cover the *Sun* with a cloud, and the *Moon* shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD.”

The destruction of the Jews by *Antiochus Epiphanes* is described as casting down some of the host of heaven and the stars to the ground (Daniel 8:19).

The destruction of Jerusalem during the time of the Prophet Joel describes God’s judgment in phenomenal terms: darkening of the Sun, and turning the Moon to blood (Joel 2:30, 31). This is consistent with Matthew’s



description of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD – a giant metaphor describing political collapse.

The judgment on Idumea and Bozrah in Isaiah 34:5-6 uses symbolic language and pictures the mountains melting with their blood.

The identical language is given in Revelation 6:13-14. Revelation 6 is not the end of the world. It comes at the wrong place in the book to be the end of the world, unless one's believes in parallelism which Futurists do not.

Adam Clarke has the right perspective:

Commentators generally understand this, and what follows, of the end of the world and Christ's coming to judgment: but the word immediately shows that our Lord is not speaking of any distant event, but of something immediately consequent on calamities already predicted: and that must be the destruction of Jerusalem.

**30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**

*The sign of the Son of Man in heaven* is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. This is not Jesus' second-coming or the end of the world, but the terminal judgment on the nation at its collapse in 70 A.D. The judgment of Jerusalem is *the sign-- not* of the second-coming of Christ, but that Jesus has been glorified as Mediator and sits at the right hand of God in heaven. A literal rendering of the Greek reads, "And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven."

*The sign* is not Jesus appearing up in the sky, but rather the sign is the smoking ruins of Jerusalem which indicates that the Son of Man is in heaven judging the wicked tenants. The judgment of Israel is the sign to that nation that Jesus is indeed the Lord and Christ, the Ruler over the nations. As the exalted Lord at the right hand of God, He is able to bring vengeance upon His enemies.

Our Lord's allusion to Daniel 7:13 in the second half of this verse makes this interpretation unavoidable: Jesus quotes a passage very familiar to the Jews where the Son of Man is not *descending to earth*, but is, rather, *ascending to the Father to be "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him..."* (Daniel 7:14).

He is the One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days. The imagery of Daniel's vision where the Mediator comes up to God in the clouds of heaven to receive universal authority indicates that the destruction of Jerusalem was near the beginning of His reign and not at the conclusion of it. The temple's destruction in 70 AD was the time when it was clear that the Son of Man, rejected by the leaders of his people, had been vindicated and enthroned at the right hand of God. Having ascended into heaven, our Lord executed His authority to destroy the wicked nation. Jesus told the disciples on the eve of his ascension, "all authority is given unto me" (Matthew 28:18; Romans 1:4; Daniel 7:14; cf. Mark 14:62). This judicial power was demonstrated at the destruction of Jerusalem when Christ crushed apostate Israel.

Bray says the *sign* is the "proof that the Son of man is in heaven" (p. 141). His judgment upon unbelieving Israel in 70 AD is proof that he has appeared before the Ancient of Days to receive his everlasting kingdom (the right to rule). The "**sign**" is *the destruction of Jerusalem*, or to put it another way, *the destruction of Jerusalem is proof of claim with strict proof of claim that the Son of Man reigns in heaven*.

*Then:* The word "*then*" references to the climatic proof that Jesus' words are being fulfilled—the proof that He is in heaven governing the affairs of men.

The word "*heaven*" defines the location of his rule. It does not say "a sign of the Son of Man" will be seen in heaven. *The destruction of Jerusalem is the sign that the Son of Man rules in heaven* (Bray, p. 142). The location is heaven, **not** the sky. It is **not** the sign which is in heaven, but the Son of Man who is working from heaven (David Chilton: Bray, p. 143).

*In summary*, the great destruction of Israel, Jerusalem, and its temple was the sign that the Son of Man was enthroned and governing the affairs of the nations from heaven. Jesus said to Caiaphas you shall see the Son of man "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

The term "sitting" refers to his inauguration and session at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32-34).

The term "coming in the clouds of heaven" refers to the execution of His rule from heaven. He received power in heaven (Acts 2:38), and Christ exercises it from heaven towards earth. **The destruction of Jerusalem is**

**the visible proof of the presence and authority of the Son of Man.** This is the end of geo-political Israel; the graveyard for the nation.

The modern Ashkenazi settlement in Palestine and formation of the modern state of "Israel" is not even remotely connected to Jewish ancestry of those in our Lord's day. That the modern state of "Israel" has any claim upon that land is a ruse, a lie, a deception, a hoax, a geo-political trick fostered by the Jewish media upon gullible Christians.

Some refer to the existence of other signs: Farrar (p. 516: Bray, p. 128) reported from Josephus, Tacitus, and the Talmud about a sign that occurred during Passover, 65 AD:

“a mysterious light had gleamed for three hours at midnight in the Holy of Holies; how the enormous gates of brass, which it required the exertions of twenty men to move, had opened themselves, and could not be closed.” Apparently, the priests heard sounds saying, “Let us depart from here.”

Josephus, Book V tells of the sign of the sword that appeared in the sky over Jerusalem a whole year before her destruction:

“ . . . and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariot and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘Let us remove hence.’” (Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 1:454 (6.5.3); Quoted by Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus, p. 124.);.

**Tribes:** The word “tribes” does not refer to the nations at some future judgment to our time, but to Israel’s *twelve scattered tribes* at the time of the nation’s destruction in 70 AD. All the people from various tribes of Israel scattered around the Mediterranean shall mourn when they hear of Jerusalem’s ruin. And, they did!

*Coming*: the word “coming” here does not refer to the second-coming, but to His presence, His apocalyptic, in-time coming to judge the nation. He did not have to physically manifest Himself for his presence to be known. In Exodus 19, the Lord came down upon the mountain in fire, but no one saw a bodily shape of the LORD. Jesus did come in 70 AD, but not in a physical, material, bodily form. That awaits His Parousia at the end of the age. Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary) says this is a *vivid metaphor* to explain earth-shaking events.

Bray says today’s student is woefully ignorant of historical interpretation on this passage, and he declared that most commentators in the 1800’s understood Matthew twenty-four in light of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD (p. 147-150). He is correct! Henry Hammond (1681), Thomas Newton (1754), N. Nisbett (1802), Adam Clarke (1832), and John Gill (1809) took the view that His coming in this verse referred to the doom on Jerusalem.

Whatever this passage means, it must be interpreted in light of *terminus ad quem* of the nation in 70 AD. It had to take place in that generation. Only in recent times, times when a plethora of dispensational apocalyptic literature hit the news racks have expositors shifted to a Futuristic interpretation of Matthew 24. Modern conflicts in the Middle East fostered by the presence of Zionists in Palestine and the godless, immoral act of driving innocent Palestinians from their roots has fueled futurism.

A preterist interpretation, however, does not invalidate a future Return of Christ!! Jesus predicted both: His coming in judgment to destroy unbelieving Jerusalem (70 AD), and His coming at the end of the age to separate the sheep from the goats.

*Clouds of heaven*: The expression “*coming in the clouds of heaven*” is apocalyptic language. The first use of celestial movements as symbolic of divine intervention into the affairs of men is in Genesis 37:5-11. The sun and Moon did not literally bow to Joseph, but his brothers (signified by the stars) did literally bow to him. Likewise, coming in the clouds refers to divine intervention—his coming in wrath, vengeance upon his unbelieving people.

- The word “*coming*” (*parousia*) means *presence* Note the various comings:
- Matthew 10:23 *until the Son of Man come* is a reference to his arrival at that time.

- Matthew 18:20 *There am I in the midst* refers to a spiritual presence.
- Matthew 28:20 *I am with you always* refers to his spiritual presence, not physical presence.
- John 14:18, 26 *I will come* refers to Pentecost. It was not literal presence, but spiritual.
- Acts 22:14 *See that just One* was not physical vision, but spiritual perception.
- Acts 26:16 *I have appeared unto thee* was verbal, but not visual (Acts 9:7).
- Romans 8:9, 10 *If Christ be in you* is spiritual presence, not physical.
- 1 Corinthians 9:1 *Have I not seen* refers to hearing, not seeing with the eye.
- Revelation 2:5 *I will come* refers to spiritual presence to judge, not physical.
- Revelation 3:3 *I will come* refers to a divine visitation, not a physical presence.

The word “coming” in Matthew 24 is also found in Matthew 21:40. In Matthew 21, the master *comes* (v. 40) and *takes away* the kingdom of God (v. 43). When did Jesus come and take away the kingdom from Israel? We know the kingdom of God was given to the church, but His coming to do so was not a literal coming, but a sovereign work from His position in heaven. Furthermore, He did come in 70 AD to take away the kingdom, the temple, the city, the nation, and the land from Israel.

The expression “*coming down*” in the OT refers to divine intervention. It is apocalyptic, symbolic imagery.

- Genesis 11:4 The Lord came down to see the city refers to intervention, not physical presence.
- Genesis 18:21 I will go down refers to divine intervention.
- Exodus 3:8 I am come down to deliver Israel is a reference to intense involvement of God.
- Deuteronomy 33:2 To come from Sinai refers to divine intervention, not presence.

- Psalm 18:9 He bowed the heavens and came down is symbolic language.
- Psalm 47:5 The hills melted at the presence of the Lord is symbolic language.
- Psalm 50:3 Our God shall come with a fire is apocalyptic language.
- Psalm 97:5 The hills melted like was at the presence of the Lord is symbolic language.
- Isaiah 31:4 to come down refers to the Lord's intervention for Zion.
- Isaiah 64:3 to come down, the mountains fled refers to divine intervention.
- Isaiah 66:15 The Lord will come down with fire is apocalyptic language for intervention.
- Hosea 8:1 He shall come as an "eagle against" is a metaphor for judgment on Israel.
- Micah 1:3-4 *And will come down* and melt the mountains is apocalyptic language.

The expression "*in the clouds*" refers to divine intervention to redeem or judge in the affairs of men. The cloud may be real, but the essence of YHWH was hidden from the human eye.

- Exodus 16:10 The glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud
- Exodus 19:9 I come to thee in a thick cloud
- Exodus 34:5 And the Lord descended in a cloud
- Leviticus 16:2 I will appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat
- Numbers 11:25 And the Lord came down in a cloud
- Psalm 18:9-12 Around about Him were . . . thick clouds
- Psalm 97:2-5 Clouds and darkness are round about him
- Psalm 104:3 Who maketh the clouds his chariot
- Isaiah 19:1 The Lord rideth upon a swift cloud
- Daniel 7:13 One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven
- Joel 2:1, 2 the day of the Lord cometh . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness

- Nahum 1:3 The clouds are the dust of his feet
- Zephaniah 1:14-15 That day is a day of wrath . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness
- Matthew 24:30 they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven
- Matthew 26:64 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . . coming in the clouds
- Mark 13:26 They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds
- Mark 14:62 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . and coming in the clouds of heaven
- Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds and every eye shall see him
- Revelation 14:14 Upon the cloud one sat like the Son of man

*See:* The term “see” is *eido* in Greek can mean to see with the eyes or it can mean “to be aware, have knowledge of.” In this passage the word “see” represents *the perception* that the Son of Man is fulfilling His word about Jerusalem. When Jerusalem fell, men could perceive His coming — his involvement in the judgment on Jerusalem. They *would not see a physical person*, they would see with the *mind's eye His presence* on those wicked people. The destruction of Jerusalem was *proof of claim* regarding our Lord's sovereignty and His session at the right hand of God.

*Tribes of the earth shall mourn:* The expression "tribes of the earth shall mourn" does not refer to the nations, but to the twelve tribes of Israel who mourned over the loss of their beloved city and esteemed temple. Further, after the destruction of Jerusalem, a general hostility and persecution broke out in every city in the Roman Empire against the Jews. The word “earth” either refers to the fact the twelve tribes were scattered over the Roman Empire, or it is direct reference to the survivors of twelve tribes represented on earth, in Jerusalem, on the day of Jerusalem’s destruction.

**31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

*The great trumpet:* The trumpet appears to be a symbolic representation of inauguration of gospel proclamation in the first century (cf. Exodus 19:16;

20:18; Isaiah 27:12-13). If this is a literal trumpet with a literal blast, our Lord is talking about His second-coming.

*Angels:* The "angels" (avgge,louj) are gospel messengers sent forth to proclaim the gospel of Christ in the four corners of the Roman Empire in order to gather his elect into his fold; that is, they are Christian evangelists (John 11:51-52; Psalm 50:3-5). (Bray quotes Roderick Campbell, Henry Hammond, Nisbett, Milton Terry, and Ezra Gould, John Ellicott, George Murray as supporters of this theory, p. 187-189). If these are literal heavenly angels, our Lord is referencing his Second-coming.

Adam Clarke agrees saying the angels are "his messengers, the apostles, and their successors in the Christian ministry."

*Gather his elect:* The "elect" refer to believers. The Lord wanted to *gather* His people as chicks under His wing (Matthew 23:37), but they would not come. Now his messengers would go forth and gather his elect from the *four winds* of the Roman empire.

## **This Generation**

**32-34 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.**

*Fig tree:* Christ appeals to this agrarian society to admit a political truth that as leaves form on a fig tree indicating that summer has arrived, so the arrival of Roman armies at Jerusalem indicates the end the Jewish nation is imminent . . . even knocking at the door.

*All these things* refer to the premonitory events leading up to destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

*This generation:* The expression "this generation" does **not** refer to a future generation or our generation, but references the generation living at the time of Christ; i.e., to the generation of his disciples of which some would not taste of death until they saw the Son Man coming in glory in judgment upon Israel.

To say these verses refer to a future generation or to the doom of the world at the end of the ages is to sever the text from its context. Hal



Lindsey erred by preaching that "this generation" refers to the generation alive following the alleged establishment of Israel in 1948. According to his calculations, Christ had to return by 1988. Edgar C. Whisenant, NASA Engineer, wrote a booklet titled, "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988." Both were wrong because they were built on the hermeneutic errors of dispensationalism and the belief that modern Ashkenazi, Zionist Israel was a fulfillment of prophecy.

*In conclusion*, Matthew 24:1-34 is about the destruction of Jerusalem. It answers the disciples question about when the temple would be dismantled.

[1] Jesus taught His disciples that there were two ages: "This age" which is this evil age, and the "Age to Come" which is the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:38-40). It is not certain, however, how much of this they really grasped. It is not clear whether the disciples were connecting the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, the end of this evil age, or the end of the Jewish age. It is clear, however, that Jesus is talking about one main subject: the destruction of the temple and the nation of Israel as the disciples knew it.

[2] The word "coming" does not always refer to Jesus' second advent. Scripture teaches that that Christ comes to help his people at different times and in different ways. It is possible to believe that Jesus comes to judge or to save and still hold to a distinct coming we know as the 2nd Coming.

## Part V

# As the Days of Noah

### Matthew 24:36–51

As a Preterist, John Bray ties this section into the destruction of Jerusalem. The partial Preterist, Robert Reymond, believes this section fits the Lord's second-coming; that is, up to verse 34-36 our Lord has been discussing the destruction of Jerusalem, but now changes the subject to the Second-coming.

Reymond (1998) identified the use of the pronoun in "that day" referring to the Coming of the Son of Man for his people at the end of the Christian age. Bray disagreed with this view saying that Jesus is still talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in section 36-51.

I am compelled to be consistent and not divide Matthew 24 into two themes. Because section 1-35 is the critical portion regarding an historic interpretation of Christ's discourse on the destruction of the temple, Matthew 24:36-51 are interpreted in light of the events of 70 AD with only brief remarks being offered on the following verses.

**36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.**

*That day:* The "that day" is to be understood, not as the Second-coming of Christ, the end of the world, or the Last Judgment, but of the coming of the Son of Man to take vengeance on the Jews for their rebellion against the Lord. Though men of that day had a general idea that judgment was looming on the horizon against the Jewish nation, no man knew the exact year, day, or hour of the nation's demise. See Hebrews 10:25. (John Gill, on Matthew 24:36, 1809 ed., Vol 2, p. 241: Quoted by Bray, p. 260-261).

*Knoweth the hour:* Regardless of how many books are published by prognosticators, no man knows the day or hour! Even angels did not know. In reference to our Lord, it may be best to say that He, as a servant, was not responsible to know about that day or to predict it with it chronological certainty.

**37-39 But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.**

*Days of Noah:* The destruction of Jerusalem is compared to the sudden deluge that took place in Noah's day; that is, just as men were going about their chores on the day the rains fell, so Jews would continue to pursue their own interests until the Son of Man issued the order to demolish the capital city and its temple. This interpretation does not rule out the possibility that the last days of this age before Christ's return will be like the days of Noah.

**40-42 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.**

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

*Taken and left:* We should let Luke's presentation rule here. "...For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:23-24). Further, notice that the destruction of Jerusalem is near the beginning of Christ's reign and that Jerusalem will be under the control of Gentiles until the end of Gentile dominion.

*Your Lord doth come:* The context is still the destruction of the temple. The coming is the Lord's coming in judgment upon wicked Jerusalem. The "taking away" refers to be taken away by judgment to be destroyed.

It is the unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Jew that is taken away.

Josephus claimed that 1,100,000 Jews were killed in the Jewish Revolt, and that 97,000 were captured and transported to areas around the Mediterranean. Approximately 87,000 of the survivors died in Roman Gladiator games, by crucifixion, and illness. Only 10,000 reached Rome alive. There, they were sold as slaves. Paul called this "wrath to the uttermost" (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

Further, the statement that "Jerusalem would be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" is true today in that

Ashkenazi Gentiles, some of which practice a form of Judaism, are Gentiles controlling the modern state of Zionist Israel.

Adam Clarke says,

"The meaning seems to be, that so general should these calamities be, that no two persons, wheresoever found, or about whatsoever employed, should be both able to effect their escape; and that captivity and the sword should have a complete triumph over this unhappy people."

**43-44 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.**

*Goodman of the house:* The "goodman" refers to the head of the home, a man and father, who is expecting a raid on his assets stays awake with club in hand ready to defend his property. The "breaking up of the house" is a reference to the Jewish house; that is, Jerusalem being broken up stone by stone by the Romans.

*Be ready:* Jesus wanted the Christians to be ready so that they could flee before the Romans came to destroy Jerusalem. The followers of Christ took that advice and fled Jerusalem before the Roman armies arrived (Clarke). They believed, endured in the faith, and were saved (24:13).

**45-51 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

*The faithful and wise servant:* These verses describe the character Jesus expects of His disciples during the troublesome times of the first century. He wanted his disciples to be faithful and not slothful. Likewise, there is an application for modern Christians. As servants of Christ we should do our duty. We can demand no more and should expect no less. Let us

remember, judgment must begin in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). Our Master not only judges evil men, He seeks to perfect His people in the furnace of affliction. Under trial, we are tempted to leave our post. The admonition here is not to be a doubting, slothful hypocrite, but a true Christian conscientiously performing his duties to God and man. If your duty is to chop weeds in the garden, may the Lord find you whacking away when He returns.

### **In Conclusion**

The Futurist sees the entire passage of Matthew 24 as applying to some unfolding destruction prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Preterist interprets Matthew twenty-four as having been completely fulfilled in the first century. It does not reference a time future to the reader. The historicist understands the destruction of Jerusalem and the second-coming of Christ to be so mingled, one cannot separate the two. No doubt, this passage is difficult to interpret. The debate is sure to outlast our time.

### **A Warning**

Though this paper has sought to explain the Preterist interpretation of this passage, it does not mean every passage referring to the Lord's coming must be interpreted Preteristically. In one sense, all historical judgments are a prelude of the final destruction of heaven and earth. My disappointment with Bray was that he appears to be a consistent Preterist who interprets 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5 and 2 Peter 3 to likewise apply to the first century, though he does not discount the Second-coming or a future resurrection. Christ is coming and when He comes, His deity will be unveiled and He will strike the entire earth with the rod of His wrath.



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