

**Matthew**

**Chapter 24**

By

**Don Stewart**

Brought to you by

**Blue Letter Bible**

**[BlueLetterBible.org](http://BlueLetterBible.org)**

## MATTHEW CHAPTER 24

The Olivet Discourse is the fifth and last of the discourses of Jesus. As is true with the other discourses, it concludes with the formula “and when Jesus finished saying all these things” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

It is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it while sitting on the Mount of Olives. The time was right for Jesus to give such a discourse since His death was about to occur in a few days and it was necessary to let His disciples know about what was to come. Any optimism they might have had concerning an immediate kingdom coming had to be laid to rest. Though the crowds on Palm Sunday were shouting, “Hosanna,” and welcoming Him as their King, the same crowd, in a few days, would be shouting crucify.

In this last discourse Jesus will speak of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the course of the present age. He will also give signs leading up to His Second Coming. Therefore a key theme in this passage is judgment: Judgment upon Jerusalem 24:1-35; judgment associated with His coming 24:36-51; two great parables of judgment 25:1-30; and the scene of the judgment of the nations 25:31-46. Judgment was a similar theme in chapter 23.

Mark records the story of the widow putting her money in the treasury between the time of the denunciation of the religious leaders and the Olivet discourse. Matthew does not record this account.

However chapter 23 and 24 are different in the fact that 23 is public teaching while 24 is done privately before only four of His disciples. All five discourses of Jesus were spoken only to the disciples (with the partial exception of chapter 13).

The Olivet discourse has been the subject of much discussion among interpreters, “This chapter and its synoptic parallels . . . present, in many respects, the most difficult problem in the evangelic records” (Bruce, p. 287).

### THE PREDICTION OF THE TEMPLE’S DESTRUCTION (24:1-3) [Mark 13, Luke 21]

The first two verses of chapter 24 are closely related to the last two verses of chapter 23. Jesus told them their house would be left to them desolate (23:38) and now He will expand upon what that means.

The Jews were looking for the Messiah to rule and reign, not to die. They were waiting for Him to rule from the temple—not to see the temple destroyed. They expected Him to bring peace and prosperity. In contrast Jesus will predict times of great trouble before all this occurs. The rule of the Messiah will have to wait for another time. Thus He predicts judgment upon the temple after turning His back upon it and the city of Jerusalem.

**Matt. 24:1** As Jesus went out from the temple and was proceeding away, his disciples came to him to show to him the buildings of the temple.

**As Jesus went out from the temple** Jesus has left the temple both physically and symbolically after pronouncing its destruction.

**and was proceeding away,** He was going away as One who did not ever intend to return.

**his disciples came to him** From Mark's gospel we discover that it is not all the disciples but rather only four of them (Peter, James, John, and Andrew).

**to show to him the buildings of the temple.** They probably wanted to change the attitude of gloom that has transpired with the various denunciations Jesus had just given. The disciples, obviously bothered by Jesus' last statement, come to Him to point out the beauty and magnitude of the structure. Even in the Roman world the temple was known for its beauty (2 Maccabees 2:22). Josephus described those who approached the temple at a distance saw it looking like a snow mountain topped with golden pinnacles. This monument was something Herod the Great had been building for over forty years, not for the glory of the Lord, but for the glory of himself.

Since Jesus and His disciples were from Galilee this magnificent structure would only be seen on the occasion of their visit to Jerusalem.

In their history, the Jews viewed the temple as invincible (see Jeremiah 7:4).

**Matt. 24:2** And he answered and said to them, "You see all these things do you not? Truly I say to you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, until all is torn down."

**And he answered and said to them,** His response to their pointing out these beautiful buildings will now change their mood.

**"You see all these things do you not?"** The question requires an affirmative answer. In other words, "Take a good look at these buildings. You ask Me to look, now you look." He calls them things, not buildings, possibly showing His disdain for what Herod had done in enlarging the temple and its compound.

**Truly I say to you,** This is another one of Jesus' solemn statements which will shock those that hear Him.

**there shall not be left here** This is the strongest way the Greek language has of making a solemn statement.

**one stone upon another,** This speaks of total destruction. Robert Mounce makes an interesting observation:

Jesus responded with the prediction that the buildings would be brought to ruin. Not a single stone would be left intact. Critics who think that the bulk of Matthew comes from the early church rather than from Jesus himself are hard pressed to explain why there is no mention at this point of the burning of the temple. A . . . prophecy after the event would not have omitted such a specific item (Mounce, p. 221).

**until all is torn down."** This strong statement of coming destruction must have been a great shock for the disciples because it was an obvious reference to judgment. They were familiar with Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of the first temple (cf. Jeremiah 9:14; Micah 3:12), which occurred in 586 B.C., the thought of the destruction of the Second Temple could only indicate that final judgment, and the end of the age, was about to occur. The idea of "a stone upon a stone" indicates total destruction (and one that reverses the building process [Haggai 2:15]). According to Jesus, the symbol of God's presence among His people would again be destroyed.

Some see the statement as not an exact description of what happened but rather a strong statement, couched in prophetic language, that the temple would be totally destroyed.

Jesus had already hinted of such things earlier—His symbolic cursing of the fig tree (21:12). Like the barren fig tree, the city and temple would be destroyed because they had only the appearance of fruit, not the reality. Bruce remarks.

The aim of any prophetic discourse Jesus might deliver at this crisis, like that of all true prophecy . . . [is] to forewarn and forearm the representatives of a new faith, so that they might not lose their heads or their hearts in an evil and perplexing time—not to gratify curiosity but to fortify against coming trial (Bruce, p. 287).

**Matt. 24:3** While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when these things shall be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”

**While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives,** A fitting place for the discourse concerning the end of the age since Zechariah 14:4 tells us that this is the spot that He will return (see also Acts 1:11). Therefore, the place where He gives instruction about His return is the site of His return.

It is natural for an interval of silence to follow such strong words. Jesus and His disciples are now on the other side of the brook Kidron. They are sitting on the slope of Mount of Olives facing toward Jerusalem.

**the disciples came to him privately, saying,** Jesus and His disciple were sitting apart from each other each thinking their own thoughts. Now they come to ask Him about what they have just heard Him say. Mark tells us that this was a private meeting with only four of His disciples—Peter, James, John and Andrew (Mark 13:3). They were no doubt troubled by His reference to the destruction of the temple and wanted to know more about what He had said.

**“Tell us, when these things shall be,** “These things” repeats the same thing Jesus had previously said (vs. 2) with respect to the destruction of the temple. They want to know when this will happen.

**and what will be the sign of your coming,** What is *the* specific sign of Your coming. This particular Greek word *parousia* is only used in the Gospels in this chapter (vs 3, 27, 37, 39). *Coming* in this context is a technical term referring to the coming as King to set up His kingdom, the end of the present age and the beginning of the age to come. We will find the specific sign given in verse 15—the Abomination that causes desolation.

**and of the end of the age?”** The close of this present age and hence the beginning of the Messianic age. They seemingly associated the destruction of the city, the temple, and His coming with the end of the age. It appears they took for granted all these would happen together. Since they believed Jesus’ prediction of the coming destruction, they want to know *when* and *how* these things will occur. Therefore it seems the main thing they are asking is about the destruction of the temple, which they assumed, would be accompanied by the other events.

In the Greek text these two terms “the sign of Your coming” and “the end of the age” are linked together by one article—yet they are *not* speaking of the identical thing. A great number of commentators assume the Greek compels us to take the two words as identical, but this is not the case (see Wallace, pp. 270-290). Therefore, though the terms may overlap, there is a distinction between the two.

The term “end (consummation) of the age” is not found again in the remainder of the Olivet discourse.

Matthew does use it elsewhere (13:39,40,49; 28:20). It refers to the end of this present age and the beginning of the Messianic age. The disciples asked these questions with the assumption that the events would occur simultaneously. In their mind the leveling of the city and temple would be the end of the present age.

Since the questions refer to both the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the coming of Christ—events that did not happen at the same time—the issue now arises as to how to interpret His answer (24:4-36). “The essential problem is that Matthew seems to move back and forth between an impending crisis (the fall of Jerusalem), and the end of the age when Jesus would return in judgment (Mounce, p. 221).

### How To Understand The Olivet Discourse

There are four basic views on how to interpret the Olivet discourse.

1. The preterist (Latin for past) assumes everything in this discourse refers to the fall of Jerusalem and has nothing to do with His Second Coming. All things predicted in this discourse were fulfilled with the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
2. The futurist view denies any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and sees everything referring to His Second Coming. Jesus answers the question about His coming, which will not be at the fall of Jerusalem though the disciples assumed it would be.
3. The preterist-futurist view find references to both events vss. 4-14 refer to the present age vss. 15-28 the fall of Jerusalem, vs. 29-31 the Second coming, and vss. 32-41 the certainty of fulfillment of prophecy.
4. Others who hold the preterist-futurist view find a double reference in 15-28 to both the fall of Jerusalem and of the end of the age.

Within these major views there are many differences in details among the commentators.

### SIGNS THAT WILL CHARACTERIZE THE AGE (24:4-14)

Jesus presents a list of signs that will characterize the age before the His coming.

**Matt. 24:4** And Jesus answered and said to them, “See that no one leads you astray.

**And Jesus answered and said to them, “See that no one leads you astray.** He begins by warning them not to be deceived by premature claims of His coming. He tells them to “take heed” (see Hebrews 3:12). This warning about being misled occurs three times in this discourse (4,11,24). Previously He had warned His followers to look out for those prophets who work signs in His name (7:15,22). The point of this discourse is to guard against deception and terror—not to gratify curiosity.

Jesus will now outline the course of the present age leading up to the events of His return (4-14). Some commentators believe that He is merely giving signs that precede the fall of Jerusalem.

**Matt. 24:5** For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will deceive many.

**For many** The first omen is that there will be false Messiahs. He predicts there will be many.

Presumably they will not all come at once but rather over a long period of time.

Josephus inform us that this was the chief reason the people went to war against Rome (*War of the Jews* 6.54).

**will come in my name,** This means they will either come using the name of Jesus or that they will come assuming the Messianic office of Jesus.

**saying, ‘I am the Christ,’** They will claim to be the genuine Messiah—the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Josephus tells us that there were many false Messiah’s in the first century (*War of the Jews* 2.259-63; 6.285-88; *Antiquities* 20. 97-98).

Scripture also testifies about such people: Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36,37) as well as the Egyptian who started a revolt (Acts 21:38).

The goal of the different Messianic movements was independence from the Romans. The leaders of these movements, having that aim in mind, came in the name of Christ whether or not they actually claimed His title.

**and they will deceive many.** As there will be many false Messiahs, so shall there be many people who follow them. For example, in A.D. 135 a man named Bar Kokhba claimed to be the Messiah and led a rebellion against Rome. His rebellion caused the expulsion of all remaining Jews from the Holy Land.

Jesus wanted His disciples to stay out of this rebellion against Rome. Though the majority of the people would be involved, this was not the fight of Christians. We have a different mandate from the Lord.

**Matt. 24:6** For you are about to hear of wars and reports of wars; but see that you are not alarmed, for it must take place, but the end is not yet.

**Note on a variant reading:** Instead of *it is necessary to take place*, some manuscripts read *all things must take place* or *these things must take place* or *all these things must take place*.

**For you are about to hear of wars and reports of wars;** Wars will occur as well as reports of them. This refers to actual war and wars that are threatened, wars both near and remote. The reference probably refers to wars in the Holy Land.

**but see that you are not alarmed,** This will not signal the end. Wars in the Holy Land or threats of war do not signal the end. Therefore do not be terrified or scared out of your wits.

**for it must take place,** These things are necessary before the end.

**but the end is not yet.** Commentators differ as to what “end” Jesus has in mind. Is it the destruction of the temple or the end of the age? If it refers to His Second Coming, it is important to note that the course of this present age will be characterized by wars and reports of war. Mankind will not rid himself of war until the coming of the Messiah.

**Matt. 24:7** For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

**Note on a variant reading:** After earthquakes some manuscripts read *and pestilence*.

**For nation will rise up against nation,** War will not end until the Prince of Peace comes. This brings the issue of war beyond the Holy Land. Some see this referring to civil war among the Jews that lead to the destruction of the temple.

**and kingdom against kingdom,** Kingdoms are nations that are ruled by hereditary leaders.

**and there will be famines** Though Jesus was able to miraculously feed both Jews and Gentiles while He was here on earth, lack of food will prevail in some cases until He returns. These famines are probably not to be associated with the wars since they are linked with earthquakes.

**and earthquakes in various places.** Not only will there be wars, other terrible events will occur such as famines and earthquakes. Wars are man-made disasters while earthquake and famine are natural disasters. Still the end is not yet.

**Matt. 24:8** All these things are the beginning of birth pangs.

**All these things are the beginning of birth pangs.** This is a Biblical way of describing distress. Some believe that this is Rabbinical idea that birth pangs will be associated the Messiah. The point is, when these things occur, the believers should not be alarmed, these events do not signal the end.

**Matt. 24:9** Then they will deliver you over into tribulation, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations because of me.

**Then** This is not to be taken in the sense of chronological sequence here or in verse 10. It is during this period of trouble that these things will happen.

**they will deliver you over into tribulation,** This is the third sign—persecution of the believers. The apostles are to have their own tribulation (the same Greek word as 24:21 yet here without the word *great*). Those who follow Jesus are not promised an easy road. “The disciples were not to be mere spectators of the tragedy of the Jewish nation destroying itself. They were to be active the while, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, propagating the new faith” (Bruce , p. 290).

**and they will kill you,** Martyrdom for Christ is something that will continue until He returns. Luke qualifies the statement “some of you” (Luke 21:16).

**and you will be hated** For the idea of disciples of Jesus being hated see John 16:2.

**by all the nations because of me.** The disciples of Jesus should expect persecution to continue and to increase before He returns. Hatred will come from all the nations, not merely the Jews.

**Matt. 24:10** And then many will be offended, and will betray one another, and will hate one another,

**And then many will be offended,** This refers to so-called disciples of Jesus. The Greek word translated “stumble” is *skandalizo* where we get our English word “scandal.” They will be “made to stumble” or possibly “stumble themselves.” The ones who are not genuine believers will be stumbled and stumble others.

**and will betray one another, and will hate one another,** Because of the persecution, many of the so-called believers will actually turn on the genuine believers (see parable of the seed hitting the rocky places

13:21).

**Matt. 24:11** and many false prophets will arise and deceive many.

**and many false prophets will arise and deceive many.** As there will be many false Messiahs, so shall there be many false prophets. In this context the false prophets arise among the Christian community. They are given false presentations of the faith.

**Matt. 24:12** And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

**And because of the increase of lawlessness,** The false prophets will encourage the people to be lawless. This is the sort of thing that we read about in Revelation 2 in the church of Thyatira. Jezebel was encouraging the people to practice lawlessness in the name of Christian freedom.

**the love of many will grow cold.** There will be a lack of love among the believers. Jesus said the world will know that we are His disciples by the love we have one for another (John 13:34,35). Paul told Timothy that in the last days people would love themselves more than they loved God (2 Timothy 3:2). "One of the sad features of a degenerate time is that even the good lose their fervor (Bruce, p. 291).

**Matt. 24:13** But the one who endures until the end will be saved.

**But the one who endures** Love and endurance are two of the great virtues of the Christian. Endurance is an important theme with respect to future events (Daniel 12:12-13).

**until the end will be saved.** The context here is endurance in the face of tribulation and persecution and the promise of ultimate salvation is to those who endure.

**Matt. 24:14** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached into all the world as a testimony unto all the nations, and then the end will come.

**And this gospel of the kingdom** This is the good news about the kingdom.

**will be preached into all the world as a testimony unto all the nations,** Before Christ can return, there must be a period of universal evangelism. That is not to say that the return of Christ is contingent upon our reaching every person on the earth (see Revelation 14:6) as though believers have the power to speed up or delay His coming. It means the gospel will be spread worldwide without any geographical or racial distinction. Though Paul had not yet reached Spain when he wrote Romans (Romans 10:18) he could say that his missionary work had gone out throughout all the earth.

**and then the end will come.** The unavoidable time of tribulation and persecution will have several effects: the commitment of many will grow cold; others will fall away and betray those whom they formerly stood with; and sin will increase. At the same time, however the period before the end will be marked by the proclamation of the good news that Jesus had been announcing in His ministry.

All the sufferings in verses 5-12 were experienced in the years prior to A.D. 70 and the fall of Jerusalem, and in varying degrees they have been signs experienced by the church down to the present time. These signs have characterized the age in which we live.

He wishes to impress on the disciples that the end will not be for a good while, therefore he

emphasizes the amount of preaching that can be done (Bruce p. 291).

### **THE SPECIFIC SIGN: THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (24:15)**

Jesus now gives them the one sign that will indicate the nearness of the end.

**Matt. 24:15** Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, the one reading let him understand,

**Therefore, when** This refers to what He has mentioned concerning the end. He has shown us what is not the sign of the end, now He will answer the disciple's question regarding the specific sign to look for.

**you see the abomination of desolation,** This is the sign of the end—the abomination of desolation. We could translate this in a variety of ways: “the abomination that causes desolation” “the horror which consists of desolation”

Bruce makes an important point with respect to the meaning of this phrase:

It must point to some broad, easily recognizable fact, which His followers could at once see and regard as a signal for flight; a fact not merely shocking religious feeling but threatening life (Bruce, p. 292).

As to the exact meaning of this phrase there have been many different suggestions:

1. The Roman army coming into the holy land. Once they came into the land all would know about it. The desolation is that which they would inevitably bring.
2. The attempt to put the statue of Caligula in the temple.
3. A technical phrase for the desecration of the temple which will be accomplished by the future Antichrist.

**which was spoken by the prophet Daniel,** Note that Jesus referred to Daniel as a prophet and the Pharisees hypocrites! This phrase is found in Daniel 9:27; 10:31; and 12:11. Mark, when describing this event, does not refer to Daniel.

**standing in the holy place,** This is a very specific reference. Those who believe this passage refers to the fall of Jerusalem understand the holy place to be the holy land or the banners of the Roman army that came into the temple when it was destroyed. The problem with the latter view is that by the time the Roman armies reached the temple, everyone was dead. It was much too late to flee. Scripture gives no specific example of the holy land referring to the “holy place.” It seems clear from Scripture that the holy place is a reference to the temple.

**the one reading let him understand,** These are probably the words of Matthew, rather than Jesus. The reader could refer to those Jews who read it and understand its meaning without divulging it to the Romans. A second possibility is that it refers to the reader of the Book of Daniel. More likely it refers to the person who is publicly reading the Scripture. The books of the New Testament were to be read publicly 1 Timothy 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 1:3). In this case the reader

would give an explanation to the people what was meant.

In 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes in an attempt to wipe out Judaism set up an image in the Holy of Holies. The exact same phrase was used of his act in 1 Maccabees 1:54; cf. too 2 Maccabees 8:17). Matthew refers to the statement of Daniel the prophet referring to this event (9:27;11:31; 12:11). Therefore we are to look for the desecration of the temple as the sign that will mark the end of the age.

Therefore there is the necessity for the temple to be rebuilt and for sacrifices to be offered before this event can take place. 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4 gives us further information with respect to this event. The final Antichrist, will stand in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem and claim to be God. He will remove any image that may have been their (the Ark of the Covenant?) and will replace it with an image of himself. He will cause the sacrifices to stop. This desecration of the temple will be the sign that begins the last three and one half years of the seventieth week of Daniel, or the Great Tribulation.

### **THE COMMAND TO LEAVE (24:16-20)**

The people are instructed to leave when they see this event.

**Matt. 24:16** then let the ones in Judea flee unto the mountains.

**then let the ones in Judea** The reference to Judea suggests a Jewish setting. Judea spoke of those in Jerusalem and in its general vicinity.

**flee unto the mountains.** This event will trigger the great tribulation period. A time of terrible suffering is about to come. The mountains would be those outside of Judea, east of the Jordan.

The church historian Eusebius, *Against Heresies*, iii., 5, 3 tells us that many Jews did indeed flee the destruction of Jerusalem by going to Pella.

**Matt. 24:17** And let no one upon the housetop, come down to take the things out of his house.

**And let no one upon the housetop,** The house tops in those days were flat.

**come down to take the things out of his house.** The urgency of leaving is stressed (cf. Genesis 19:17). Flight should be immediate. People could actually leave the city by jumping from one housetop to the next. This may have been Jesus' meaning. It is also possible that He was referring to the outside staircases that led up to the flat rooftops—one could go down from the top of the house without entering inside.

**Matt. 24:18** And let no one in the field return to get his cloak.

**And let no one in the field return to get his cloak.** No time to retrieve possessions or clothing. A person usually slept in their cloak (outer garment) and wore it on cold mornings when working in the field. Once the day grew warmer they left it on the edge of the field. Jesus says there will be no time to get that cloak once the tribulation begins.

**Matt. 24:19** Woe to the ones pregnant and to the ones nursing in those days!

**Woe to the ones pregnant and to the ones nursing in those days!** Pregnancy and nursing would impede quick travel. It would make the journey particularly difficult for these women. Since these cannot

be avoided, the women are to be pitied. If this verse refers to the final Great Tribulation, rather than merely the fall of Jerusalem, then we learn that babies will be born during this time. In many ways, life will go on as usual until the Lord comes.

**Matt. 24:20** And pray that your flight will not occur in winter or on the Sabbath.

**And pray that your flight will not occur in winter** In this context, winter means traveling in bad weather with cold nights.

**or on the Sabbath.** Since travel was limited on the Sabbath, fleeing on the Sabbath would make it obvious that you were leaving. For example, animals could not be secured for travel on the Sabbath. The illustration is very Jewish.

### **THE GREAT TRIBULATION (24:21-28)**

Jesus will now speak of an unprecedented time of trouble.

**Matt. 24:21** For then there will be great tribulation, as such has not occurred from the beginning of the world until the present nor ever will be.

**For then there will be great tribulation** This is the reason for the urgency of the flight—Great Tribulation.

**as such has not occurred from the beginning of the world** With all the sufferings that humanity has experienced, none will be like this period of time.

**until the present** Nothing before has matched this horrific situation.

**nor ever will be.** To emphasize the horror of the situation we are told that no suffering before or after will ever be compared to it. This has been understood in three different ways:

- (1) Hyperbolic language referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the horrible suffering that followed.
- (2) The literal judgment that will happen at the end of the age.
- (3) The destruction of Jerusalem is used as a type or foreshadowing of the last judgment.

**Matt. 24:22** And unless those days are shortened, no flesh will be saved, but because of the elect, those days will be shortened.

**And unless those days are shortened,** The time must be cut short.

**no flesh will be saved,** If God did not intervene, no one would be preserved. Saved refers to physical safety.

**but because of the elect,** The elect is used elsewhere only in vss. 24,31 and 22:14. The reference could be either to Christians or to Israel as the elect or chosen people. The context of this passage as well as

other references to the elect (see Romans 11:28) tend to favor the view that He is referring to Israel. The elect are those Jews who are selected for deliverance in the time of the Great Tribulation.

The apocryphal Book of Enoch begins: “The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and righteous who will be living in the day of tribulation when all the wicked and godless are removed.”

**those days will be shortened.** Something has to intervene to stop the onslaught. Shortened is literally “cut off.” The tribulation will not go on indefinitely but will be stopped by God to keep the Jews from being annihilated and the world from destroying itself.

**Matt. 24:23** Then if any one says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or, ‘There he is.’ Do not believe him.

**Then if any one says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’** These are erroneous reports of Christ’s coming. Someone claims to know His exact location.

**or, ‘There he is.’** He is coming from some where.

**Do not believe him.** The warning not to believe in Messianic claims despite the great sufferings they are enduring including the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jesus says do not even begin to believe these claims.

**Matt. 24:24** For false Christ’s and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders so that to deceive, if possible, even the elect ones.

**For false Christ’s** Pseudo Christ’s will come on the scene. Jesus words have proven to be true as many false Christ’s have appeared and have led many astray.

**and false prophets will appear** False prophets are most likely those who proclaim that others are the Messiah. Bruce writes, “The demand would create the supply, men offering themselves as Saviors . . . with prophets preaching smooth things and assuring a despairing people of the deliverance at the last hour” (Bruce, p. 293). We find a similar example before the destruction of the first temple when Hananiah, the false prophet, was rebuked by Jeremiah for saying God would not destroy the temple.

**and perform great signs and wonders** The exact nature of the signs and wonders is not expressed. Are they true miracles or are they deceiving signs that claim to be miracles? Does Satan have the power to work miracles?

**so that to deceive,** The purpose is to deceive the chosen ones. See Deuteronomy 13:1 for God warning His people not merely to blindly follow those who offer signs.

**if possible,** The phrase suggests that it is not possible. Because they are in the care of their Father (cf. 10:29-31) it is not within their power to accomplish their purpose.

**even the elect ones.** Therefore the elect will not ultimately be deceived.

Interpreters who seek for exact historical fulfillments point to Simon son of Gioras and John of Giscala:

the former the Messiah in the desert of Tekoah, gathering a confiding multitude about him; the latter the Messiah in the secret places, taking possession of the interior part of the temple with its belongings in the final struggle (Bruce, p. 294).

**Matt. 24:25** Behold, I have told you before hand.

**Behold,** This is emphatic. Note well!

**I have told you before hand.** We have been warned therefore there is no excuse for being ignorant on this matter. The principle is clear: Believers are not to go after someone who claims to represent Christ merely because that person claims to have some miracle-working power. According to Jesus, false prophets will come on the scene attempting to deceive the elect. This remains true until our day.

**Matt. 24:26** If, therefore, they say to you, ‘Behold, he is in the desert,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it

**If, therefore, they say to you, ‘Behold, he is in the desert,’ do not go out,** The desert would have been a likely place for the Messiah since it was where Moses, Israel’s first deliverer, came from. At the time of Jesus it was generally believed by the Jews that the Messiah would come from the desert. This is why we find all the excitement over John the Baptist when he was baptizing in the desert. It is also the reason they asked him if he were the Christ.

**or, “Behold, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.** He is neither out publicly in the desert nor privately in the secret chambers. Both expressions point to non-visibility. “The false prophets bid the people to put their faith in a Messiah not in evidence” (Bruce, p. 294).

**Matt. 24:27** For just as the lightning comes out from the east and flashes to the west, in this manner will the coming of the Son of Man be.

**For just as the lightning comes out from the east and flashes to the west,** In contrast to the false prophets, Messiah’s coming will be visible to all.

**in this manner will the coming of the Son of Man be.** His coming will be as unmistakable as lightning—self evident (see Revelation 1:7).

**Matt. 24:28** Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather together.

**Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather together.** Vultures gathering around those who have been killed is used in Scripture as an image of judgment (Luke 17:37, Ezekiel 39:17-20, Revelation 19:11-21). This has caused some to feel that this difficult statement of Jesus has to do with judgment.

It seems, however, that this is a proverbial truth. Though some take this to refer to judgment, there is no reference to judgment in the immediate context. More likely, it speaks of the unmistakable character of His coming. As surely as you know that the vulture are there when an animal dies, so surely you will not be able to miss the Second Coming.

### THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST (24:29-31)

Jesus now describes His literal Second Coming.

**Matt. 24:29** And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heaven will be shaken.

**And immediately after the tribulation of those days,** Two major possibilities as to what “immediately after” means. The time after the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem or a yet future experience of great suffering just prior to the Second Coming. The context seems to point to the Second Coming.

Those that believe this tribulation refers to only the fall of Jerusalem have given various explanations as to how it concludes with Jesus’ return.

1. Jesus skips from the fall of Jerusalem to the next significant prophetic event—His return.
2. The entire period from the destruction of the temple until the Second Coming is the tribulation period.
3. The tribulation and the fall of Jerusalem prefigures and blends in to the final tribulation period.
4. The tribulation begins with events around the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 66-70) but the conclusion is postponed until the time of the end.
5. The return spoken of in the following verses is used symbolically for the fall of Jerusalem and not His Second Coming. Jesus would therefore come spiritually in A.D. 70.

**the sun will be darkened,** This is the prophetic language of the Old Testament (Isaiah 13:9; 34:4; Joel 3:15).

**and the moon will not give its light;** It is debated how literal we are to understand these words.

**and the stars will fall from the sky,** If taken literally this seems to be a collapse of the physical universe.

**and the powers of the heaven will be shaken.** Haggai (2:6) spoke of this type of shaking. Whether these things will literally happen or not, it points to great heavenly signs that will occur before Christ comes.

**Matt. 24:30** And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the sign of the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

**And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,** The Son of Man is Jesus’ reference to Himself. What exactly is the sign of the Son of Man is not directly stated. “The question what is this sign has greatly perplexed commentators who make . . . confessions of ignorance (Bruce, p. 295).

The sign of the Son of Man could simply refer to Jesus. This phrase could be translated “the sign which is the Son of Man.” (a genitive of apposition in Greek).

**and then all the tribes of the earth** This refers to everyone on the earth, not just the Jews.

**will mourn** Will they mourn because they recognize Him coming as their Judge? Or is it because they recognize Him as their Savior, the One they rejected?

**and they will see** His coming will be visible.

**the sign of the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of the sky**, Revelation 1:7 tells us that He will return with clouds and that every eye will see Him.

**with power and great glory**. This is the Second Coming of Christ.

**Matt. 24:31** And he will send his angels with a great trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from the ends of heaven until the ends of the earth.

**Note on a variant reading:** Instead of *with a great trumpet* some manuscripts read *with the sound of a great trumpet*.

**And he will send his angels** The angels are the messengers that will gather the elect. This is not the rapture of the church where the Lord Himself gathers His church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

**with a great trumpet**, Many have attributed this trumpet to the one in 1 Corinthians 15 “the last trumpet.” However, the subject of 1 Corinthians 15 is the church, here it is Israel.

**and they will gather together his elect** This is not the rapture of the church but the gathering together of Israel. In this context the elect refers to Israel, not the New Testament church. Unless this distinction is recognized much confusion will occur.

**from the four winds**, The four winds speak of every direction.

**from the ends of heaven** This is similar to phrases in Deuteronomy 30:4; and Psalm 19:7.

**until the ends of the earth**. At that time the dispersed remnant of Israel will be gathered from the four corners of the earth.

### THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (24:32-35)

Jesus illustrates this with the parable of the fig tree.

**Matt. 24:32** Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

**Now learn the parable from the fig tree:** The parable of the fig tree seems to be a simple parable from nature. The kind of tree chosen will teach us a lesson about His return.

**when its branch has already become tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.** When the fig tree begins to sprout leaves, one knows that summer is near. Tender branches and young leaves are a sure sign of summer. In the same way, when certain events take place, one may know that the end is near. Just as the sprouting of the fig tree indicates summer is near but not yet present, so the coming of the Son of Man is near but not yet present when these events take place.

The fig tree is often viewed as representative of Israel. When Israel begins to show signs of national life then you know the end is near. The problem with this view is:

- (1) Identifying Israel with the fig tree. There is no specific Old Testament reference that identifies Israel with the fig tree.
- (2) The parallel passage in Luke when it says “Behold the fig tree and *all the trees.*”

**Matt. 24:33** In the same manner even you, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the doors.

**In the same manner even you,** As is true with the fig tree so shall it be true of Jesus’ coming.

**when you see all these things,** What are these things? Are they the signs in 4-14 or 15-21 or is it the signs associated with the Second Coming itself?

**you know that it is near, right at the doors.** When these things come to pass, then you can know that the end is at hand.

**Matt. 24:34** For truly I say to you, that this generation will not pass until all these things be fulfilled.

**For truly I say to you, that this generation will not pass** What did Jesus mean by the phrase “this generation?” The problem can be simply stated: the generation that was alive when Jesus spoke these words have all passed away, yet events described did not take place. How then do we understand what He meant? As for the interpretation of the meaning of “this generation” there are the following possibilities.

1. Liberal theologians, as well as some others, have understood that Jesus expected to return before the Fall of Jerusalem. He believed that His coming again in power would be within a generation. This view would have Him making an incorrect statement. Since He admitted that He did not know the time of His coming, this erroneous statement can be attributed to the self-imposed limitation of His knowledge.

The problems of holding a view like this are enormous.

First, this is not the only possible way in which we can interpret His statement. As we will observe, there are a variety of different ways we can understand His statement.

Second, it involves a misunderstanding of what Jesus meant when He said that neither the Son knew the day or the hour (vs. 36). If the limitation of Jesus’ knowledge is understood as referring to the general time of his return rather than the actual day and time of His return, then why would He contradict himself with the analogy of the budding fig tree?

Third, by other statements in Matthew’s gospel, we see that Jesus indicated that He planned to be away for a long period of time before coming again.

2. The generation that heard His words would see the fall of Jerusalem. This would make this statement and entire the Olivet discourse refer only to the fall of Jerusalem. His coming therefore would not be a literal coming when Jerusalem fell but rather He would come figuratively in power with the destruction of the city. The problem with this view is that many verses in this discourse have to do with His Second Coming, not merely the Fall of Jerusalem.

3. The generation refers to generation alive at the time of His Second coming. Those who saw the signs of the end (i.e. the abomination of desolation) would also be alive when He returned. In other words, it would be a short period of time from the abomination of desolation until the Second Coming.
4. The term refers to the people of God (Israel) will not pass from the scene until all these things be fulfilled. This generation therefore would mean “this race.” It would be another indication that the Jews, as a nation, would continue to exist until Christ comes despite the great persecution and tribulation which they are about to receive.
5. This expression in Matthew clearly alludes to a sinful generation, one ripe for judgment (12:39, 45; 16:4; 23: 36). If this is what Jesus is referring to, then it could fit either the fall of Jerusalem or the end of the age or be referring to both.
6. In the Old Testament, the term refers to a believing group of people.
7. The generation refers to the generation that sees Israel return to their land after a long period of exile. This goes hand in hand with understanding that the parable of the fig tree refer to the regathering of the nation Israel to a modern state. The generation that sees that happen will be the generation that witnesses the return of Christ.
8. There is also the possibility that this prediction is capable of multiple fulfillment. Therefore Jesus had both the fall of Jerusalem (happening within a generation) and the events prior to His Second Coming. His generation would see the fall of Jerusalem. In like manner, the events will be similar when He comes again.

**until all these things be fulfilled.** All these things must have the same meaning as the previous verse. All the events around either the fall of Jerusalem or His Second Coming.

**Matt. 24:35** The heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will never ever pass away.

**The heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will never ever pass away.** This is the strongest way in which someone could make a solemn statement in Greek. We could translate it, “There is no way ever, ever, ever, for My words to pass away.” The words which He has referred to are the not merely the words in this context, but His words as a whole. His message will never pass away.

This is quite a claim! Can you imagine the possibility of this coming to pass given the time, place, and circumstances in which Jesus made the statement, yet it has come to pass.

#### **THE COMMAND TO BE READY (24:36-44)**

Jesus now instructs His disciples to be prepared for His coming. In doing so He gives us three illustrations. In the first parable (the days of Noah, 37-41) His coming is totally unexpected. In the second parable (the good and evil slaves, 45-51) His coming is sooner than expected. In the parable about the 10 virgins (25:1-13) His coming is later than expected.

**Matt. 24:36** But as for that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

**Note on a variant reading:** Some manuscripts do not have the phrase *neither the Son*.

**But as for that day and hour,** This refers to the exact time of His coming. It is not referring to the general time period but rather the specific day and hour.

**no one knows,** There is no human being who knows.

**not even the angels of heaven,** Though the angels are the ones who will gather the elect, they do not know when He is coming.

**nor the Son,** In contrast to verse 33 of what can be known—namely, the signs that we are to look for prior to His coming, Jesus confesses that at this time, He does not know the precise day and the hour of His coming.

**but only the Father.** The explanation of His lack of knowledge is found in the kenosis doctrine of Philippians 2:6-8 where Christ emptied Himself of certain independent use of His divine attributes while here on earth. The time of the coming of the Son of Man is the Father's alone (Acts 1:7). This is in keeping with the Old Testament idea "there will be one day, and that day is known to the Lord" (Zechariah 14:7 LXX). The signs of the end can be known with certainty, however the time of the end is unknown to everyone except the Father. What counts is the fact that the Son of Man will return.

Again we must stress the difference between the nature of Christ (as God) and His position when He was here on earth (as a man). In His humanity there was self-imposed limitations. After His resurrection and Ascension into heaven, those limitations have been removed. Revelation 1:1 tells us that He now knows these things.

**Matt. 24:37** For just as in the days of Noah, so will it be with the coming of the Son of Man.

**For just as in the days of Noah,** The comparison now is to the time of Noah—not Noah himself.

**so will it be with the coming of the Son of Man.** There will be parallels between Noah's days and the days before Jesus comes.

**Matt. 24:38** For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the ark.

**Note on a variant reading:** Some manuscripts do not have *those* before the word *days*.

**For as they were in those days before the flood,** He will now list the parallels. Note again the parallel is not to Noah, but to those living in Noah's day. Therefore the parallel is to those who are to be judged—not the ones saved.

**eating and drinking,** This does not necessarily have the idea of indulgence. Some have argued that the term translated *eating* actually refers to gluttony because the Greek word is often used of beasts eating. However since word also is used for humans eating (John 6:58; 13:18) no sinister idea should necessarily be seen. The main idea is that all things are going on as if nothing is going to happen.

**marrying and giving in marriage,** Men are the ones who marry, women are given in marriage. The people assume life will continue indefinitely.

**until the day Noah entered into the ark.** Business as usual until the flood hit. They did not believe the

preaching of Noah, neither will they believe the preaching about the end.

**Matt. 24:39** And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away, so will it be with the coming of the Son of Man.

**And they knew nothing** Again it is the unbelievers who are this illustration. They were not looking for this judgment to occur, rather they were ridiculing those who spoke about it.

**until the flood came and took them all away,** The people were not convinced until the flood came and removed them from the scene.

It seems that at least as far as humanity is concerned, the flood was universal—it took them all away. This and other biblical passages seem to teach that the flood in Noah’s day took away all but eight people—the remainder perishing in the flood.

**so will it be with the coming of the Son of Man.** As the people of Noah’s day were unaware of the impending doom, the same is true for the generation that will see the Second Coming of Christ. This emphasizes the suddenness of Christ’s coming.

**Matt. 24:40** Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left.

**Then two men will be in the field,** People will be working side by side when this judgment comes.

**one will be taken and one will be left.** As with the time of Noah, there will be a division of humanity. Just who will taken them is not stated—whether it be the angels or the Son of Man.

**Matt. 24:41** Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and the other one left.

**Two women will be grinding at the mill,** We now have the illustration of two women working next to each other. The reference is to a handmill, which required two to work at it. Grinding took a considerable time and in that culture it was considered woman’s work.

**one will be taken and the other one left.** Another illustration of people working side by side where one goes and the other stays. Those who are taken can refer to those taken in judgment or those taken by the Son of Man when He comes with His angels. It seems better to refer to them to be taken in judgment because the comparison is with those unbelievers in Noah’s time who were judged, not those who went into the ark.

The application of these verses is made clear in the exhortation of the following verse.

**Matt. 24:42** Therefore, be watching, because your Lord is coming at such a day that you do not know.

**Note on a variant reading:** Instead of *day* some manuscripts read *hour*.

**Therefore,** Because of all these things He has told His disciples.

**be watching,** The importance of being ready at any time is now stressed. The followers of Christ should be in constant readiness. Watching includes an active dimension of righteous conduct.

**because your Lord is coming** Notice it is “your Lord” who is coming. He is the Lord of all.

**at such a day that you do not know.** This means “of what sort of day,”—whether it be early or late.

**Matt. 24:43** But know this thing: that if the owner of the house had known at what night watch the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.

**But know this thing:** Here is one thing you should know.

**that if the owner of the house** Concerning the owner of the house Bruce notes, “[it] suggests the idea of a great man, but in reality is a poor peasant who is in view. He lives in a clay house which can be dug through (sun-dried bricks) . . . .Yet he is the master in his humble dwelling (Bruce, p. 298).

**had known at what night watch** The night was divided into various watches.

**the thief was coming,** It is the business of the thief to know when the people are not at home. He keeps people in the dark with respect to the time of his coming.

**he would have kept watch** The problem with thieves is we do not know when they are coming or even if they are coming at all.

**and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.** A simply analogy is drawn between the coming of Christ and a man whose house is broken into. Since Christians cannot know the time of His coming we must constantly watch. As the thief comes unexpectedly, so will Christ.

**Matt. 24:44** So, you also must be prepared, because the Son of Man will come in an hour when you do not expect.

**So, you also must be prepared,** In the same manner, as the precautions are made for the thief.

**because the Son of Man will come in an hour when you do not expect.** The reason we are to be ready is because He will come at an unexpected time.

#### **THE PARABLE OF THE FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANT (24:45-51)**

Jesus illustrates the importance of vigilance with two parables.

**Matt. 24:45** “Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom the master appoints over his household servants and gives them food in the proper time?”

**“Who then is the faithful and wise slave,** Jesus now asks the question about the identity of this servant.

**whom the master appoints over his household servants** The master would appoint one of his slaves over his household.

**and gives them food in the proper time?** The faithful slave is one who rightly uses that which His Father has given him.

**Matt. 24:46** And blessed is that servant whom, when his master comes, he will find doing in this manner.

**And blessed is that servant whom, when his master comes,** The Lord will now tell us who is the blessed servant. He is the one not demoralized by the delay of the return of His master.

**he will find doing in this manner.** He is the one doing the will of God when our Lord comes despite the delay. Again, there is the inference in this parable of a long delay between Jesus' first and second coming.

**Matt. 24:47** For truly I say to you, that he will place him over all his possessions.

**For truly I say to you, that he will place him over all his possessions.** He will receive a reward for his faithfulness. In the same manner, believers will be rewarded for their faithfulness (1 Corinthians 3).

**Matt. 24:48** But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'

**And if that evil slave** This is not the same individual just spoken of but a man placed at the same post. The evil slave is not someone who was once good but who became evil as some have erroneously taught. The word translated "evil" simply means bad or corrupt.

**says in his heart,** This is an expression that means "says to himself."

**my master is delaying his coming,** In this parable, the slave thinks the Lord is coming later than expected. In the previous illustration they did not believe the master was coming at all. He is now demoralized because his master has not returned. Bruce writes: "The delay had been so long that the unworthy servant goes on his bad way as if the master would never come at all (Bruce, p. 298).

Again, this emphasizes that the time between when the master had left and when he is returning is considerable.

**Matt. 24:49** and he will begin to beat his fellow slaves, and eat and drink with the drunkards,

**and he will begin to beat his fellow slaves,** He takes advantage of the master's delay by acting irresponsibly.

**and eat and drink with the drunkards,** Rather than providing the needs for his fellow servants he violates his master's command.

**Matt. 24:50** the master of that slave will come in a day when he is not prepared, and in an hour which he does not know.

**the master of that slave will come in a day when he is not prepared,** This slave is not expecting his master to come so soon

**and in an hour which he does not know.** Matthew returns to the theme of the unexpected coming of the master. The time remains unknown and should be a motivation for godly living.

**Matt. 24:51** And he will cut him into pieces and assign his part with the hypocrites, where there will be the crying and the grinding of teeth.

**And he will cut him into pieces** This mean to cut into pieces with a saw—which was an actual form of punishment in ancient times. There is a question as to how literal we are to understand this. Bruce remarks on the literal understanding of the phrase, “But this can hardly be, especially as in the following clause the man is supposed to be still alive” (Bruce, p. 298). Some see it as a mere beating or thrashing with the whip.

**and assign his part with the hypocrites,** The hypocrites is where this hypocrite belongs. For Matthew there is no worse group than the hypocrites (cf. 6:2-18; 15:7; and especially ch. 23), and the wicked servant of this parable was, if anything, a hypocrite.

**where there will be the crying** The final destination for hypocrites will be the place of the judgment of the wicked.

**and the grinding of teeth.** Matthew has used this term before for judgment.

#### SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 24

Jesus gives His last of five discourses—the one covering the events of His return. The background is His statement at the end of 23 with reference to the desolation of the temple. His disciples showed Him the temple and its magnificence, possibly thinking that the destruction He predicted was only symbolic. However as they would find out in the coming years, the destruction did actually occur.

The interpretation of this chapter is difficult because there are two events that are in view—the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as well as the Second Coming of Christ. Just exactly which passages refer to which of these events has long been a source of contention among commentators. In our explanation of this chapter we have tried to fairly represent all views that Bible believers hold.