

10. Prophecies of the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Coming of the Lord—Matt 24

Matt 24 is the source of many false teachings and misinterpretations, resulting in many prominent false doctrines of the 21st century. The false teachings focus mostly on the various millennium theories, such as premillennialism, postmillennialism, and transmillennialism. What these teachings have in common is their rejection of the scriptures that teach that Christ was raised from the dead to sit at the right hand of God, as king of the kingdom of God. One such passage—referred to many times in these studies—is Eph 1:19-23:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

They also have views of a second coming completely contradictory to such passages as 2 Thess 1:6-10:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

Some teach that Christ will come and reign 1,000 years before the judgment. Others teach that Christ returned at the destruction of Jerusalem when, in their false teaching, all the New Testament prophecies were fulfilled, including the prophecies of judgment and eternal punishment. This lesson will not attempt to respond to the host of arguments made by these false teachers, except in the context of the specific verses, which they misuse. We defer in this matter to the apostle Peter, who said in 2 Peter 2:1-3:

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.

Paul told Timothy to refuse these false teachers in 2 Tim 2:22-23:

22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

When people speculate about the coming without using scriptural authority, there is no way to answer their myriad of *what ifs* and human conjectures. This lesson focuses on what the scriptures say.

Background and Introduction

The episodes, where Jesus condemned the false teachers in Jerusalem, had just concluded with Jesus announcing his return in Matt 23:38-39: “38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39

For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

As they left the temple, Jesus called attention to the impending destruction of the temple in Matt 24:1-2:

1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Afterward the apostles raised two questions: When will this happen? What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Matt 24:3 reads:

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

In the context, the first question—*when will this happen?*—refers to *the abomination that causes desolation* (verse 15); that is, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (verses 1-2). The second question—*what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*—refers to Christ's return at the very end cited above in 2 Thess 1:6-10. Readers must be careful not to confuse these questions and answers— either willfully or unwillfully.

Then the End Will Come—Matt 24:4-14

Jesus begins by focusing on the manner of his coming, listing the many historical events that must take place before he does come. He alerts the apostles to the false announcements that will come:

Matt 24:4-8 reads:

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

The Lord's statement is a summary of the history of man during the last days, and he begins by warning, "Watch out that no one deceives you?" Almost every war and difficulty of man finds those who seize upon the occasion to forecast that the Lord is coming. Recent examples are the Gulf War and the Iraq War. Nothing by man or nature signals the Lord is coming. The Lord here uses the words *the end*, and in verse three, he used the words *the end of the age*. These are not ambiguous and uncertain terms about which men may speculate as to the meaning. The Lord and the apostles used these terms to identify and exactly state when the end would come.

In Matt 10:22, *the end* indicates the time when those who stand firm will be saved: "22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." In Matt 13:38-39, *the end of the age* tells when the harvesting of the sons of the evil one comes: "The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels." In this same context in Matt 13:40-42, the end of the age identifies the time when the Son of Man and his angels destroy all evil, end in punishment:

40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at **the end of the age**. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom

everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [Emphasis added.]

Finally, in Matt 13:49-50, the separation comes of the righteous and the wicked:

49 This is how it will be at **the end of the age**. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [Emphasis added.]

When the apostles asked in Matt 24:3, "And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" the focus had to be at the coming of the Lord and the final judgment.

Paul clearly proclaimed *the end* at just this very time of the coming of the Lord in 1 Cor 15:24-26:

24 Then **the end** will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. [Emphasis added.]

Matt 24:9-14 added further detail:

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then **the end** will come. [Emphasis added.]

This passage is an accurate description, in prophecy, what we now see, in fulfillment, as 2,000 years of history. After persecution, after many turn away, after many false prophets, the faithful will be saved in *the end*. After the gospel of this kingdom is preached to the whole world, then *the end* will come. Peter also pinpoints this *end of time* as at the coming of the Lord and the destruction of the world. His words are graphic and specific in 2 Peter 3:7-10:

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for **the day** of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. [Emphasis added.]

The Destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem—"the Abomination that Causes Desolation"

Beginning in verse 15, Jesus moves to answer the apostles' other question. Jesus prompted that question as they were leaving the temple grounds in Matt 24:1-2:

1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

They implored, "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen?" To which Jesus gave the answer in the passage beginning in Matt 24:15-22:

15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. 22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

What these verses are about is explicit in this passage—"the abomination that causes desolation"—is the destruction of the temple, the end of the daily sacrifice, and the destruction of Jerusalem. It is what was spoken of by Daniel the prophet.

The age, marked by the fulfillment of the prophecy to destroy the temple and concluded with the victory over death, will be marked with great deceit. Predictions of the appearance of Christ would be accompanied by signs and miracles, and indeed these have run rampant across the centuries, just as Christ forecast in Matt 24:23-25:

23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time.

Daniel clearly prophesied a desolation and desecration of the temple of such magnitude that the daily sacrifice would end. In Dan 11:31-32, armed forces would do this:

31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. 32 With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

Of course, by the time Christ was speaking, the abomination was imminent; and c 40 years later, the armies of Caesar would lay siege on Jerusalem and destroy the city and the temple. In Daniel's prophesy, the end is not the end of his life, nor is it the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is the resurrection. Dan 12:13 reads: "13 As for you, go your way **till the end**. You will rest, and then at the **end of the days** you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." [Emphasis added.]

The destruction of Jerusalem was God's final judgment against a city, similar in its completeness to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Roman legions lay siege in 70 AD; and on the 15th day of the siege, Agrippa's wall fell; on the 72nd day the fortress tower, Antonia, near the temple, fell; and 12 days later (84th day) the daily sacrifice ceased. On the 105th, day the temple was burned; and on the last day (134th day), the whole city was in flames.

In 132 AD-135 AD, the last Jewish rebellion occurred, after which the very site of the temple was plowed up. An altar to Jupiter sat on the temple site, and Jews were excluded from the city on pain of death. [Notes for the preceding two paragraphs come from JERUSALEM: the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Data Base, © 1996, 2003, and 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc.]

The Last Days

From the time of Christ on earth until the end is called the last days in the New Testament. The apostles describe these days in the same way that Christ did in Matt 24:9-14 above, For example, Peter quoted the prophet Joel in Acts 2:16-17:

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 "**In the last days**, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. [Emphasis added.]

Paul added specific details that were often the same as Christ's details of the last days. Writing in Tim 3:1-5, he said:

3 But mark this: There will be terrible times **in the last days**. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. [Emphasis added.]

The Hebrew writer separated the era from which God spoke through the prophets from the one in the last days from which he spoke through his son in Heb 1:1-2:

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but **in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. [Emphasis added.]

Of course, if they were the last days, there could be no others. The doing of evil deeds and the punishment attendant to evil deeds comes in the last days, according to James 5:3-5:

3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the **last days**. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. [Emphasis added.]

Peter places the end of the last days at the time of the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire in 2 Peter 3:3,7; 10-13

3 First of all, you must understand that in the **last days** scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. . . . 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the **day of judgment** and destruction of ungodly men.

. . . 10 But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to **the day of God** and speed its coming. **That day** will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. [Emphasis added.]

Distinguishing between the Abomination that Causes Desolation and the Last Days

Christ was very clear that no matter how terrible was the destruction of Jerusalem, it was not his coming at the end of days or the end of the last days. In Matt 24:26-28, the Lord said that we are not only to not pay attention to those who predict the end and his coming; but when he does come, it will be obvious to all:

26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

In the following verses, he does specify in detail the nature and appearance of his coming. In Matt 24:29, he quotes the prophecy of Isaiah to tell us how it will be:

29 "Immediately after the distress of those days
 "the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light;
 the stars will fall from the sky,
 and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

Isaiah uses this language twice—once in Isa 13:10-11 and again in Isa 34:4—and in both instances, he speaks of the end of the world and universe and the end of days (time).

The Lord's use of the word *immediately—forthwith*, as Vine suggests, might be more accurate—which shows that the next major event will be his return and all that it entails. Strong offers *directly*. The point is that there is no reason to expect anything other than the return of the Lord, neither in the lives of his listeners, nor in our lives today. The Lord says as much in certain words in Matt 23:30-31, beginning with *at that time*:

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

From all the prophets, these lessons have presented the characteristics and manifestations of the Lord's coming: he will come in the clouds, the angels of his power will be with him, there will be the loud trumpet call, the dead in Christ will rise, and we who are living will join them and be together with the Lord forever. These are the only events, summarized by the Lord, as those that follow *the abomination that leads to desolation*.

The Imminent and Sudden Coming of the Lord

The imminent and sudden coming of the lord demands all people for all time be prepared. In this regard, everyone who ever lives stands before the end in exactly the same way and in a sense, in exactly the same time. In the Dan 12:13, quoted above, God told Daniel of the two eternal events in the lives of all people: the end of life and the end of days. This places everyone at exactly the place concerning the event of his coming—the end is imminent and will come suddenly whether by death or by the coming of the Lord.

To describe this sudden and imminent nature of the certainty of death and his coming, the Lord, asserts the eternal principle and follows it with illustrations. In Matt 24:36, the eternal principle states the nature of the coming of the Lord: "36 "No one knows about that day or

hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Any prophecy, which would purport to set a specific time or place for the Lord to return, is false.

The first example illustrates the coming of the Lord with the example of Noah in Matt 24:37-39:

37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" leaves no room for any other interpretation. The coming of the Lord is always imminent and it surely will be sudden in its coming. The Lord will gather his righteous to eternal life. John 4:35-36 describes this harvest:

I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

God's reveals the details of His mystery of the harvest in Rev 14:14-16:

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The harvest and the resurrection are events for the righteous and so they will be the ones taken by the Lord as reported in Matt 24:40-41: "40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left." Prophecy gives the order of events for those taken in 1 Thess 4:16-17:

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

For those left, hell is just as imminent and sudden. Matt 24:50-51 describes this fate:

50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord states the lesson of this prophecy in Matt 24:42, 44—a fitting scripture to conclude his discussion of his coming:

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.
44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

Eph 1:19-23: Where is Christ now? What is the church to Christ?

2 Thess 1:6-10: What will happen to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus?

2 Peter 2:1-3: What will false teachers do?

2 Tim 2:22-23: How are we to respond to them?

Matt 23:38-39: When will we see the Lord again?

Matt 24:1-2:1 What did Jesus say would happen to the temple buildings?

Matt 24:3: What two questions did the disciples ask?

Matt 24:4-8: What will happen before Jesus will come?

Matt 10:22: When will we be saved?

Matt 13:38-39: Who is the devil? When will the harvest be?

Matt 13:40-42: What will happen at the end of the age?

Matt 13:49-50: How will it be at the end of the age?

1 Cor 15:24-26: When the end comes, what will happen to the kingdom? What is the last enemy to be destroyed?

Matt 24:9-14:9: What will happen from the time of Chris until now?

2 Peter 3:7-10: For what is the heavens and earth reserved? For what are they kept?

Matt 24:1-2: How did Jesus answer his disciples?

Matt 24:15-22: When was the abomination that causes desolation fulfilled?

Matt 24:23-25: Who will people say has appeared?

Dan 11:31-32:31: What will armed forces do? What is this called?

Acts 2:16-17: To what did Joel have reference? When would this be?

Tim 3:1-5: 3: What will the last days be like?

Heb 1:1-2: In what days has God spoken? In whom does he speak?

James 5:3-5: Who will cry out in the last days?

2 Peter 3:3,7; 10-13: For what are the heavens and earth reserved? How will the day of the Lord come? Can you describe that day?

Matt 24:29: What did Job say would happen?

Matt 23:30-31:30 What will we see and hear at the coming of the Lord?

In Matt 24:36: Who knows when the end will come?"

Matt 24:37-39: How will the Lords coing be like the days of Noah?

John 4:35-36: For what are the crops harvested?

Rev 14:14-16: Who swings the sickle to harvest the earth?

Matt 24:40-41: Who will be taken?

1 Thess 4:16-17: What will the Lord's coming be like?

Matt 24:50-51: 50: What will happen to those who are not ready when the master comes?

Matt 24:42, 44:42: Why must we keep watch?