

# The End Of Israel (Matthew 24)

His People Endure Forever: Shelf 7 — Volume 61

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We live in a world of wild speculations in the minds of some who are obsessed with the “signs of the times.” Some are so obsessed that they search through every source of religious literature for some particle of truth made by some self-proclaimed sage by which they can predict the end of the world. It

seems that there is no dearth of prognosticators who are willing to come forth with some prediction of the end of the world on a particular date.

Throughout the years, all sorts of prognosticators have come and gone. Nevertheless, we are often so naive in our ignorance of the word of God that we impetuously continue our search for another prophetic utterance of some supposed date when the world as it is comes to its final demise.

God created us to be religious beings. Therefore, we cannot help but harbor some speculations in our religious thinking concerning what will be. Because we have this seemingly unquenchable thirst to speculate concerning the future, we must be cautioned. We must be cautioned that if we give up a knowledge of our Creator and His revelation to us through the Bible, we will end up with some very twisted speculations concerning the end of time.

History has proved that there is no end to the ingenious religious inventions of speculators in reference to that which is yet to come. As a result, we live with a host of confused proclamations today that are broadcast abroad and bound on the consciences of people. All the diversity that exists among end-of-time theologians have confused people. Some religionists have become so obsessed with their speculations concerning a supposed rapture that such has become their “gospel” message that they proclaim to the lost.

There are those who seek to terrorize their innocent audiences through repeated proclamations of certain doom. When it comes to the confusion surrounding the subject of the end of the world, we cannot use enough superlatives to describe the religious excitement that is promoted by some end-of-time prognosticators. We must confess that our minds overflow with too many Hollywood productions of “end-of-the-world” scenarios. As a result, we look for too many prophets who will supposedly deliver us from an age of human annihilation.

In the western world there has been the

resurrection in the last century of a vast assortment of mystic religions. The New Age Movement, and a host of other similar humanistically-oriented religious movements, have become popular among those who are searching for something beyond this world. In a secular-oriented world that enslaves our minds to all that is of this world, mystics have simply concluded that enough is enough. There must be something that is greater than this world.

Some of these speculators with mystical inclinations have included the Bible as only one source in their library of religious sources. Since the Bible speaks of things to come, they search around in the pages of the Scriptures for some indication of the end of times. They search for something that might have been taught in the past concerning our present and future destiny. Unfortunately, too many too often look to their own imaginations or adventurous speculations in order to read into the Bible their own imaginations.

Everyone has some speculation concerning the future. For this reason, we all function in the field of **eschatology**, that is, a study of last things. We wonder about our future and the end of the world. These are serious considerations that pass through the minds of almost everyone, even the materialist who sometimes takes a brief moment to contemplate and wonder about what is next. It is simply natural to consider the future and what will become of all that which we now experience. As Christians, we conclude that there will be “global warming” that will be the end of all things. But the “global warming” that is coming will surpass “warming.” It will be the heat of fire that terminates.

In this book it has been our purpose to select a key text of Scripture to study in its historical context. We have done this in order to discover God’s revelation concerning “in time,” as well as “end of time” judgments. Everything that God brings to an end in time is a promise, or certainty, that He will do the same at the end of time.

In studying judgment subjects in the Bible, we have

discovered that several things influenced the writers and readers in the historical setting in which God brought things to a conclusion. Understanding these historical settings has helped us to understand better the inspired letters of the New Testament that were written to the first readers who experienced social chaos in history when God brought dispensations to a close. The following circumstances that greatly influenced both the writing and the fulfillment of prophecy helps us better understand that finalities are yet to come.

### **A. Jewish Persecution Until A.D. 70**

**The Jewish persecution of the church continued until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.** This persecution not only influenced the evangelization of the first century world, but it also influenced the content of the letters that were written to the early disciples.

We must not underestimate the influence of this persecution that was unleashed on the early disciples as they went from city to city preaching the gospel of the messiahship of the Son of God. The persecution of the early disciples is illustrated by what Paul said of his own life before he responded to the gospel: *“I persecuted this Way [the church] to the death, binding and delivering both men and women into prisons”* (At 22:4). In Paul’s case, he, the persecutor, went from persecuting to being the persecuted.

Embedded in the thinking of the early persecuted Christians was the hope that God would always deliver the church as a whole, though some individual saints would succumb to death as a result of the persecution. Nevertheless, God gave the church as a whole encouragement to endure through hard times of persecution. For example, John encouraged the saints of the church of Smyrna who were seeking to survive under the persecution of the state of Rome:

***Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulations ten days. Be faithful***

*unto death and I will give you the crown of life* (Rv 2:10).

## B. Jesus Prophesied The End Of Israel

The imminent end of national Israel was prophesied by Jesus and fulfilled in the first century. As the early evangelists went forth, the imminent end of national Israel was on their minds and in their message. It was the fullness of time and all prophecies in reference to the purpose for which God established a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai were coming to fulfillment. After His resurrection, and immediately before His ascension and coronation, Jesus reminded His disciples the following:

*These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things must be fulfilled** that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, **concerning Me*** (Lk 24:44).

One of the prophecies of Jesus was His coronation and reign from the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, Peter proclaimed that this prophecy was fulfilled, for Jesus was reigning as King on David's throne at the time Peter and the apostles stood up and spoke on that day (See At 2:25-33). **The fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus' kingdom reign meant the end of the kings of national Israel on earth.** It thus meant the end of national Israel. The apostles took this same message into all the world of the Jews to whom they went to proclaim the gospel. **They prepared their fellow Jews for the finality of national Israel.** Though they did not know the time of the end, they knew and preached that it was coming.

The early evangelists also took the message of Jesus that was recorded in **Matthew 24**. Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24 was an encouragement to those who suffered from the persecution of the Jews. **The persecuted saints knew that God would bring down judgment on national Israel because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah** (See Jn 1:14).

The end of Israel would also be a sign to the Jews that God had fulfilled His purpose for calling the sons of Abraham into a special covenant relationship at Mount Sinai. The purpose for Israel was to preserve a segment of society through which the incarnate Son of God could be introduced into the world. But once the Son came, and completed the atoning sacrifice, then there was no more the need for a special nation of people as Israel. The social vehicle through whom the Savior was introduced into the world passed away.

The Jews only recourse when God completed His purpose through Israel, therefore, was to turn to Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. **There was no salvation in Jewish nationalism.** The Jews had to individually accept Jesus as the incarnate Son of God who came into the world to establish a new covenant with everyone who would obey the gospel (See Hb 10:5-10). There was no other means by which they could be saved.

Because many Bible students have historically failed to understand the prophesied purpose and end of national Israel in the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the incarnation of the Son of God, they have failed to do justice to the historical events that surround the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Because of this, some Bible students would do well to be cautious about referring to those books that emphasize the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel was a major historical event in the history of the world, and particularly in the lives of the Jews. This finalization of national Israel permeates the entire New Testament.

Those were times in the first century in which God intended to terminate forever the nation of Israel through the establishment of a new covenant of grace. Since most of the early Christians were Jews, we would expect that the New Testament would contain many references, both directly and indirectly, that refer to the finalization of Israel. These are the

contexts that need further study, especially in these times when the religious world seems to be burdened with a host of prognosticators with their end-of-times prophecies.

### **C. State Persecution Would Arise**

**State persecution by the Roman government would rise in the first century as a result of the personal obsessions of Nero, Caesar of Rome.** By the end of the first century, this persecution would become dominant through other Caesars of the Roman Empire. State persecution in the latter part of the first century would be a major force of evil against the preaching of the gospel throughout the Roman controlled world. In particular, the book of Revelation was written to give comfort to Christians who suffered from state persecution that began the latter part of the first century, but extended into the second.

God would eventually bring judgment on the Roman state for her persecution of the flock of God. The early Christians, therefore, were given comfort in the fact that state persecution would not continue against the church throughout the centuries to come.

### **D. Foundation For Interpretation**

For many years biblical interpreters have placed little emphasis on the consummation of national Israel that was demonstrated by God in A.D. 70. Judgment passages in the New Testament were commonly misinterpreted with emphasis on the end-of-time coming and the final judgment by Jesus rather than the end of national Israel by the coming of Jesus in judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

As a result of our overzealous emphasis on the final coming, we have traditionally approached texts as Matthew 24 with emphasis on the end of time. Rather than a historical interpretation that had direct relevance to the ones to whom Jesus first delivered His message that God's covenant with Israel was coming to a close, we have obsessed over the end of time. Add to this the fact that there have been too

many prophecy thieves who have stolen the warning that Jesus gave to the Jewish Christians of His day in order that they prepare themselves for the end of national Israel.

We must always keep in mind three very important points when interpreting Matthew's account of Matthew 24:

### **A. Mission To The Jews**

Matthew, a Jew, focused on Jesus' ministry to those of His immediate time, specifically the Jews. Jesus came to the *"lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Mt 10:6). He came to choose the twelve apostles and then commission them to a worldwide task that would begin first with the Jews (See Mt 28:19; Lk 6:13).

The immediate ministry of Jesus through the apostles **was first to the Jews**. His ministry then became worldwide and throughout all history when the apostles and other evangelists went into all the world. Until the end of time, Jesus will continue to accomplish His mission through the global ministry of His disciples. In order to accomplish His goal of populating heaven, this historical preaching of the gospel began. In order to accomplish this mission, He initially came to work with His immediate Jewish environment.

### **B. Jesus Was The Messiah**

Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience about Jesus as the prophesied Messiah of Israel. Matthew's statements, therefore, have direct reference to the Jewish hope of a Redeemer. The Jews had to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They had to do so because God was about to physically close the book on national Israel. Those who would not accept Jesus' messiahship would most likely be caught up in the destruction and close of national Israel in A.D. 70. Through His parables and the direct statements of Matthew 24, Jesus' prophecy of the end of Israel was meant to prepare Jewish Christians who lived during the decade before A.D. 70 that the end was coming.



### C. The Imminent Coming

The pronouncements of Jesus in Matthew 24 emphasize an **imminent** coming and “end.” This was not an “end” that would happen over two thousand years later. This imminent coming would be in the lifetime of the disciples to whom Jesus made the statements of Matthew 24 (See Mt 16:27,28; 23:34-36).

The Holy Spirit inspired no New Testament writer to deceive the first century disciples into believing that Jesus would **personally** return in His final coming in their lifetime in the first century. Therefore, the context of Matthew 24 is talking about a “coming” within the lifetime of the immediate disciples.

But the “coming” in Matthew 24 cannot refer to the final coming of Jesus at the end of time simply because Jesus did not deceive His disciples that He would personally come in their lifetime. Therefore, we must approach Matthew 24 from the viewpoint that Jesus was giving information to His immediate disciples concerning some traumatic event **that was going to happen in the lifetime of the immediate Jews**. Jesus was going to come in judgment on a generation of Jews who refused to accept Him as the Messiah and Savior of the world. God was going to bring judgment on those who did not recognize the time of His visitation to the house of Israel through His only begotten Son (See Lk 19:43,44).

Many scholarly books in recent years have correctly restored emphasis on the importance of the A.D. 70 consummation of national Israel that is taught throughout the New Testament. This has led to a more consistent interpretation of many passages that deal with God’s judgment that He brought on Israel in her final years as a covenanted people. For example, we feel that Jesus was primarily discussing in Matthew 24 on a judgment “in time” upon national Israel. Therefore, we must question our thinking concerning some of the points Jesus mentioned in the context of Matthew 24 that refer to the personal lives of the disciples who would experienced these events.

When studying the text of Matthew 24 we must always consult the parallel accounts of Jesus' words on this occasion that were recorded in **Mark 13** and **Luke 21**. Both Mark and Luke record additional thoughts that Jesus gave in His personal conversation with the disciples. However, neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke give the complete discourse of all that Jesus said as it was initially stated on this particular occasion. Each inspired writer only gives that information which emphasizes the theme of his particular book. Matthew, however, gives more complete information, and for this reason, we use Matthew as the guideline text for our interpretive comments that follow.

Also keep in mind the dates of writing for each book. Since the impending destruction was in the near future in relation to the dates of writing, we cannot but feel that the impending destruction that was coming in A.D. 70 was one reason that stimulated the writing of other New Testament books in the first century. At least certain portions of the New Testament letters concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were included in order to forewarn Christians of the coming calamity of Israel.

Mark probably wrote around A.D. 50-52, Matthew around A.D. 60, and Luke around A.D. 61,62. All three writers give us a sense of social and political turmoil that existed during the era leading up to the consummation of national Israel. The writers of these epistles wanted the initial readers to know that something was up in reference to the massive rejection of Jesus as the Messiah over two decades before. As A.D. 70 drew near, the prophetic elements of Jesus' prophecy concerning national Israel were becoming clear.

In order to expedite conversions from Judaism, and also encourage the converted Jews not to return to the Sinai covenant that God had set aside at the cross, Matthew, Mark, Luke and the Hebrew writer wrote both to inform and to warn. The Holy Spirit inspired the book of Hebrews as a last theological reminder that God was finished with national Israel.

The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and Hebrews thus have an air of urgency. There is a sense of a final call to a generation that was seeking for hope in a political environment that was in social upheaval.

With this in mind, we launch into an exciting portion of God's revelation. Matthew 24 is one of the most exciting portions of God's word because the book explains what will occur in the disciples' lives concerning national Israel and their homeland of Palestine. The sense of forewarning that is characteristic of the New Testament scriptures in reference to the coming of the Lord on unbelieving Israel leaves us with the same sense of urgency in reference to the final coming of Jesus at the end of time.

### Verse 1

#### Nationalistic Pride Of The Disciples

*Then Jesus went out [of the city of Jerusalem] and departed from the temple [courtyard]. And His disciples came to show Him the buildings of the temple [that were built by Herod the Great].*

Jesus had just pronounced judgment upon the city of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:38. He had also just stated, *"Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (Mt 23:36). We feel that the disciples were surely stunned by what He had just said. According to Mark's account, and in response to Jesus' statements, **Peter, James, John** and **Andrew** came to Jesus privately while He was on the Mount of Olives (See Mt 24:3; Mk 13:3).

At least these four disciples showed their nationalistic feelings for Israel by expressing their pride in the physical structures that Herod the Great had constructed. As nationalistic Jews, they were surely thinking that these buildings, and especially the temple, could never be destroyed by the will of God. They thought that God would not bring an end to His covenanted people, and especially the glorious temple. As with many today, their nationalistic feelings were struggling against Jesus' prophecy. Nevertheless,

their loyalty to Judaism would not preserve that in which Israel had taken so much pride for centuries. Their aspirations could not work against the plan of God to terminate national Israel. It was all coming to an end. The Sinai covenant with Israel had been nailed to the cross, and now that which identified them as Jews was also coming to an end. For a time was coming when in the eyes of God, there would be neither Jews nor Gentile (See Gl 3:26-29).

## Verse 2

### Imminent Destruction Of Jerusalem

*Jesus said to His disciples, “Do you not see all these things [of Jerusalem and the temple]? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*

Jesus had prepared the disciples for this final pronouncement of judgment upon Israel. The parables of **Matthew 13:3-9,36-43; 21:33-46; 22:1-14**, and the definitive proclamation of **Matthew 23:29-39**, prepared the disciples for what He was going to reveal in this context, which things would transpire in forty years from the time Jesus made the prophecy of Matthew 24.

Jesus had earlier prophesied that the end of national Israel was at hand. The **“ax was laid at the root”** (Mt 3:10). A destructive blow was about to come upon Israel in about forty years from the time Jesus made these pronouncements during His earthly ministry. **“All these things”** would come to an end.

This last prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 is in reference to the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem that was initiated by the Roman general **Vespasian**, who would later be declared Caesar of Rome. **Titus**, his son, would complete the job of Jerusalem’s destruction. **The destruction would signal the termination of national Israel as a covenanted people of God.** This would be the fulfillment of Moses’ prophetic curse upon a people who had rejected God (See Dt 28:15-68). The

destruction would be great and final.

**Josephus** was a Jewish historian who lived during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and claimed to be among the Roman army at the time of the siege of Jerusalem. He personally witnessed the war and final fall of the city. In his *Wars of the Jews* he estimated that over 1,100,000 Jews died in the destruction; the few 80,000 or so who were left were sold into captivity. Though it is believed that Josephus may have embellished his figures. However, whatever the true figures of death and captivity were, the annihilation was complete. It was nothing short of a genocide. The temple was burned and the city levelled to the ground. The prophecy of Jesus in **Luke 19:43,44** was realized.

**For the days will come upon you when your enemies will cast a barricade around you, and encompass you and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you. And they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.**

The destruction of the temple would be God's demonstrated revelation that **He was finished with the Jews' religion, as well as His special covenant relationship with national Israel.** The purpose for which Israel was called into a covenant relationship with Him **was fulfilled by the conclusion of Jesus' time on earth.** The cross was both a finality and a new beginning. What Jesus said in the following statement at the beginning of His earthly ministry explains His mission: ***"Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill"*** (Mt 5:17). Unless we conclude, as so many do, that He was not talking about doing away with the Sinai law and covenant with Israel, then we must read the context in which Jesus made the preceding statement:

***For verily I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is***

**fulfilled** (Mt 5:18).

Some theologians just cannot connect the dots on this matter. They have a difficult time connecting the statement of Matthew 5:17,18 with what Jesus said in Luke 24:44 at the conclusion of His earthly ministry when He had fulfilled the law. After His resurrection, and before His ascension, He gathered the apostles together and said,

*These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me* (Lk 24:44).

When the preceding statement was made, the law had been nailed to the cross. When Jesus fulfilled all that was written in the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Himself, **then everything was fulfilled**. The Sinai law and covenant could pass away as Jesus brought both Jews and Gentiles into a new relationship with God that was based on their obedience to the gospel of grace.

The use of the pronoun “your” in Matthew 23:38 is significant. *“See,”* Jesus said, *“**your house is left to you desolate.**”* By the time of Jesus’ ministry, it was no longer God’s house. In the mind of God the Jewish religious leaders had already stolen the inheritance of the vineyard (See Mt 21:38,39). Jesus had said to them, *“**All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition**”* (Mk 7:9; see Mt 15:1-9). Paul was certainly correct by calling Judaism the Jews’ religion (See Gl 1:13). They no longer submitted to the word of God as the authority in all matters of faith. By the time Jesus came into the world, the religious heritage of the Jews was their authority in matters of faith. Their religious traditions had supplanted the authority of the word of God. Once again in their history the curse for rejecting God and His word was coming upon them. On a similar occasion in their history before their destruction through captivity, Hosea wrote,

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children* (Hs 4:6).

Because Israel had rejected God and His visitation through His Son, judgment was coming upon her. They had crucified the incarnate Son of God, and thus God would send forth judgment on them and the symbols of their religion.

### **Verse 3**

## **The Disciples Question Jesus**

*As He sat on the Mount of Olives [which was east of the city of Jerusalem], the disciples [Peter, James, John and Andrew] came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming [presence] and of the end of the age?”*

We can understand the astonishment of the Jewish disciples concerning the words of Jesus when He had just pronounced the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. They realized that He was talking about a dreadful event that was to befall national Israel. In view of the fact that they still believed that Jesus would possibly *“restore the kingdom to Israel”* (At 1:6), they were having a difficult time processing His statements here concerning the destruction of all that in which they had taken so much pride throughout their lives.

When we consider the parallel accounts of **Mark 13:4** and **Luke 21:7**, Peter, James, John and Andrew seem to be asking two questions: **(1)** When will the things of Matthew 23:36 happen? **(2)** What will be the sign of Jesus’ “coming” (or “presence”) and the end of the age?

The four disciples still remembered Jesus’ teaching in the **parable of the Sower** that the tares should be left with the wheat **until** the time of judgment (See Mt 13:29). *“Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age”* (Mt 13:40). Jesus was talking about **the age of His**

**first century disciples**, not some far off event that was beyond the life-span of the immediate disciples. He was certainly not speaking of events that would transpire over two thousand years later.

The Greek word ***aionios*** in Matthew 13:40 is correctly translated “age” as it is so translated in Matthew 28:20 in current versions. This Greek word was unfortunately translated by the prejudicial King James translators with the word “world”—the translators believed that Jesus in Matthew 24 was speaking of the end of the world. But in the context, Jesus was revealing judgment that would take place **“in time,”** in the generation of the early disciples.

However, the destruction of Jerusalem **in time** would be an illustration in some way of what would happen at the unique final coming of Jesus at the **end of time**. But in the historical context of Matthew 24 **Jesus was preparing His Jewish disciples for the end of national Israel**. The Jews would continue throughout history as a culture of people. However, their existence as a unique people in a covenant with God was terminated at the cross and demonstrated in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

In the context of Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus answered the preceding two questions of verse 3. He used the word “coming” that is translated from the Greek word ***parousia***. A better English translation would be “presence.” In other words, **the disciples were asking what the sign of His presence would be**. Jesus subsequently revealed two “comings” or “presences” in His teaching concerning the end of Israel. First, there would be a coming (“presence”) **in time** in judgment upon the nation of Israel. He had earlier referred to this event in Matthew 16:27,28.

*For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers], and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming [presence] in His kingdom.*



Second, by the end of chapter 25, it is possible that Jesus included a coming in judgment at the **end of time**. This would be a final presence, or final judgment of all the world. We are of the opinion, however, that the entire context of Matthew 24 refers to the coming in time in judgment upon national Israel. Only in chapter 25 does Jesus possibly move on in His discourse to the end of time.

All “comings in judgment” of God **in time** are symbolic or typical of His final presence at the **end of time**. However, we must keep in mind that before His ascension the disciples did not comprehend Jesus’ previous discussions concerning His death, resurrection and kingdom reign. **It is not probable here, therefore, that they would be asking questions about a final coming and judgment of Jesus at the end of time.** Jesus possibly included information on the end of time for our sakes only, for He knew that Matthew would eventually write all this information down for our sakes.

The immediate disciples could not comprehend the end of national Israel, let alone ask questions about the final coming of Jesus and judgment at the end of the world. This does not mean, however, that Jesus did not speak concerning final things while He was with the disciples during His earthly ministry. He revealed to them many things they did not fully understand. Only when such things were brought to their remembrance with the revelation of all truth did they fully understand what Jesus had revealed to them during His earthly ministry (See Jn 14:26; 16:13).

It is best to understand Matthew 24 as a **type**, or illustration, of the unique destruction of the world at the end of time. An example of this application would be when Jude used Enoch’s prophecy of the judgment of the flood of Noah’s day to refer to the coming judgment upon Israel for **“all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him”** (Jd 14,15). In the context of Matthew 24, Jesus also used “judgment language” in order to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem. Such language was also

used in other texts in reference to the end of the world. We would not be wrong, therefore, to use the general teaching of God's judgments in time to illustrate His judgment at the end of time.

We are discussing two "ends" in the context of Matthew 24 and 25. First, there is the **end of national Israel** that would happen in the lifetime of the immediate disciples of Jesus (See Mt 23:36; Mk 9:1). Reference to **these things** center around Israel's end by destruction (See Mt 23:36; 24:2,8,33,34).

Second, there is the **end of the world** that is **illustrated** by the judgment and destruction of the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Jerusalem. In an illustrative way, therefore, the end of national Israel would demonstrate the end of the world. As the typical Jew could not comprehend the end of Israel, so people today cannot comprehend the end of the world. Unbelievers will speak all sorts of harsh things against Christians because Christians believe there is a finality to the things of this world.

### **Verses 4,5** **Warning Against Deception**

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."*

In view of the many modern-day self-proclaimed prophets and seers that exist throughout the world, it is little wonder that Jesus here made the statement, *"Take heed that no one deceives you."* He knew that at the time of the end of national Israel there would be many self-proclaimed "messiahs" who would lead rebellions against Roman domination and occupation of Palestine. Some false prophets who sought to restore the state of Israel had already come and subsequently been killed by the Roman authorities (See At 5:36). Such messiahs and their nationalistic proclamations and movements against Rome were what eventually motivated Rome to enact a final solution to the "Jewish problem." That solution came in A.D. 70.

We must also keep in mind that in the decade before the final destruction, there would be zealous Jews who would go throughout the Roman Empire in order to recruit followers who would try to capture the dream of a restored state of Israel. The letters of **Hebrews**, **2 Timothy**, **Titus**, **2 Peter** and **Jude** were written to Christians who lived in the middle 60s. From the nature of what was written by Paul to both Timothy and Titus, it seems that even among Jewish Christian households there were those young men who were encouraged to betray their faith in Christ and march off to Jerusalem in order to engage against Rome in order to restore the state of national Israel. Jude and Peter addressed their fellow Jews in order to warn them about the impending judgment that God was about to bring upon unbelieving Jews who had for forty years resisted the gospel reign of King Jesus (See 2 Pt 3).

The decade of the 60s was a time of recruitment by patriotic Jews who sought to restore the state of Israel to her former glory. But after reminding Jewish Christians that there was no Messiah or Savior after the Lord Jesus Christ, the Hebrew writer concluded for the faithful, ***“But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”*** (Hb 10:39).

The warning of Jesus in the context of His discourse in Matthew 24 was that His disciples not be deceived into believing that the coming events signalled the end of time. Therefore, His message was not just to those residents who lived in Palestine. This was a message that was to permeate the church of Jewish parents throughout the Roman Empire in order that Jewish parents not allow their young sons to be deceived by the Jewish recruiters of the time. From our studies of the book of Hebrews that was written in the middle 60s, it seems that even some parents were being deceived into returning to Jewish nationalism and Jerusalem in order to restore the heritage of an independent Jewish nation.

People today can better understand the sociological

turmoil that arose out of the fanaticism that existed in the decade prior to the fall of national Israel. An effort to establish an Islamic state is the perfect example of what was happening among the Jews throughout the Roman Empire during the 60s. True Islam is theocratic, as was the covenant and law that God established with Israel. In the zeal to establish a true theocratic Islamic state in the Middle East, Muslim Jihadists throughout the world recruited Muslims around the world to join in the struggle to establish an Islamic state. As a result, young people betray their parents, gave up their local citizenship, and ran off to join some radical Islamic group in order to fight against the Jews in Palestine.

During the decade of the 60s, **the same was happening among the Jewish families throughout the Roman Empire.** But in the case of the Jewish families, the young men wanted to run off and join some self-proclaimed messiah in order to fight against the Romans. We can only imagine the thousands of young men who died because of the failed effort to establish an Islamic state. The same was true in the first century in reference to the failed effort to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died in the futile effort. We can only imagine how many of these were deceived Jewish Christians who were misled into joining the futile effort to restore a national state of Israel (It is time to read the entire book of Hebrews.)

Though the effort of the zealot Jews in the first century failed to materialize in their desire to establish an independent state of Israel in Palestine, those who survived the A.D. 70 ordeal did not give up their dream. Zionists continued to hope for a state of Israel that would be the homeland of the Jews.

Two thousand years later at the conclusion of world hostilities between World War I and II, this dream finally came true in 1948 in the establishment of the present state of Israel in Palestine. But the establishment of this state of Israel **had nothing to do with the eternal plan of God.** If it had, then why

did God wait two thousand years to fulfill a futile hope of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine?

Nevertheless, there are many deceived religionists today who try to be loyal to a self-proclaimed state of Israel to supposedly be a God-ordained state. At the same time in the religious “christian” world, there are some deceived people who proclaim their allegiance to such a national Jewish state, but remain committed to the gospel of King Jesus. They contradict themselves in reference to the reign of Jesus. They willingly sacrifice the present gospel reign of Jesus who has all authority over all nations, and at the same time believe that in some way Jesus will give up His present galactic reign over all things in order to come in the future to this world and reign on this literal earth in Jerusalem over a fully restored twelve tribes of Israel.

Such futile hopes are totally contrary to the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation, reign and final coming of Jesus. It is a reversal of the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God to the destiny of where He now reigns (See Ph 2:5-11). **Such thinking is an attack against the present gospel reign of King Jesus.**

Jesus’ message to His immediate disciples, therefore, certainly has a secondary application to Christians of all time. Christians must be warned in every century that there are many who come “*in the name of Christ,*” but are teaching false hopes in order to lead people astray after traditional religion. In the historical context of Timothy’s situation, Paul warned Timothy,

*Now the Spirit clearly says that in the latter times [of national Israel] some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tm 4:1,2).*

This was happening at the time Paul wrote to Timothy. For this reason the book of Hebrews was written by the Holy Spirit. **Timothy was living in the “latter**

**times.”** There were deceivers moving among Jewish Christians in an effort to recruit “patriots” to join in the struggle to restore the state of Israel.

Throughout history there is the continual threat of those who seek to recruit a following through deceptive teaching. Such deceivers today move among misguided religionists in efforts to raise money to send to Israel. They do so in order to preserve the present state of Israel. These are deceivers do not understand that God closed the door on national Israel when national Israel crucified the Son of God, who then ascended in order to sit and reign on David’s throne, just as David had prophesied (See At 2:24-36). In this case, it would be wise to heed the warning of Jeremiah to Israel:

***Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor hearken to the dreams that they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name. I have not sent them*** (Jr 29:8).

In Matthew 24:24 Jesus said that in the religious environment prior to the end of national Israel ***“false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*** John possibly wrote 1 John a few years before A.D. 70, near the consummation of national Israel. At least we see in 1 John a sense of finality for national Israel, for John wrote,

***Little children, it is the last hour*** [of national Israel], *and as you have heard* [from Jesus and the evangelists] *that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists* [who deny that Jesus is the Christ] *have come, by which we know that it is the last hour”* (1 Jn 2:18).

It was the “last hour” at the time John wrote the preceding words. Therefore, he could not have been referring to someone or something that would transpire over two thousand years later.

Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) is an antichrist. Such a person is against Christ, which is the meaning of the word “antichrist.”

But to assume that there is a specific individual for whom we are to be looking in order to determine that the end of the world is near, **is to be deceived**. This one is an antichrist.

Among the Jews at the time John wrote there were those who denied that Jesus was the Christ. John wrote an entire document to prove that the man Jesus was the Christ and incarnate Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31). In their hope of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, the Jews denied that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). And because they denied that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), they were the antichrists.

For this reason John warned at that time that Christians ***“not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God ... every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God”*** (1 Jn 4:1-3). Simply because one claims to come “in the name of Christ” and cries out “Lord, Lord” does not mean that he or she is a Christian. Only those who do the will of the Father in heaven should wear the Christian name (See Mt 7:21). Only those who are willing to submit to the gospel of Jesus by immersion into His death, burial and resurrection can live under the name of Christ. It is for this reason that those who obey the gospel of Christ compose the church (assembly) of Christ on earth (See Rm 16:16).

Obedience to the gospel is the condition for one’s salvation. This is the only condition for deliverance from a world of turmoil and sin. Salvation, therefore, is more than simply “believing on Jesus.” One’s faith must be manifested in obedience. We must not forget that James said we are justified by works, works that are in response to the gospel of God’s grace (See Js 2:14-24; 2 Co 4:15; Ep 2:10).

We would certainly add here that the deceiving false prophets who were performing “miracles” were not actually working that which was supernatural. If God had allowed the deceivers to work that which was supernatural, then they would not have been deceivers. What they were preaching would have

been confirmed true by the miracles, if indeed the miracles were truly supernatural. The fact that Jesus forewarned His disciples not to be deceived **proves that the signs and wonders were fake**. The deceivers were faking miracles in order to recruit a following to fight against Rome for the establishment of the Jewish state.

## **Verse 6**

### **Rumors Of Wars**

*“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars [throughout the Roman Empire]. See that you are not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end [of national Israel] is not yet.”*

When Rome started her campaign against insurrectionist Jews, she marched down through Asia Minor with skirmishes here and there in order to eradicate from the Empire the “Jewish scourge.” There were also other wars throughout the Roman Empire that revealed the political instability of the time. These wars would not be the end of national Israel. They would only indicate the beginning of the end. But such wars would be a signal to the Christians who were living in Jerusalem and Judea to flee the city and province because the end was imminent.

We might suppose that the Roman army started minor skirmishes with the zealot Jews in order to hasten the radical Jews’ flight to Jerusalem. As a military strategy against the insurrectionist Jews, Rome wanted as many radical Jews as possible gathered in Palestine before the Roman army made their final assault against those Jews who wanted to restore a state of Israel as it was before the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. What these loyalist Jews did not realize was that the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities centuries before meant the end of an independent state of Israel in Palestine as a God-ordained possession.

Since the return of the captives from these captivities, Palestine was continually occupied by



foreign powers, even to the day of Jesus. So what the radical insurrectionist Jews of the 60s were trying to do was undo what God accomplished through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

There are those today who are doing the same. They are encouraging the same restoration of a supposedly God-ordained independent state of Israel. They need to read their Old Testament history in order to understand that Israel's independence in their own homeland came to an end when God drove them from the land. If they cannot discover this fact in Old Testament history, then it is easily discovered in the gospel that all who are in Christ are one body (See Gl 3:26-29). Christians are now the holy nation of God (See 1 Pt 2:5,9).

The deception of restoring an independent state of Israel, however, is that the proponents cannot separate the right of the Jews as a culture of people to have their own homeland from the fact **that such a homeland would not be a God-ordained plan.** An effort to establish such a secular state ignores the gospel of the Messiahship and sacrifice of the Son of God that took place two thousand years ago. The only source that the modern-day state of Israel has in reference to God is that which was explained in Romans 13:1,2. Government of any nation is God-ordained as such, but God no longer ordains any specific government to be a nation.

The deception that would come in the latter years of national Israel in A.D. 70 would be that the false prophets of the nationalistic Jews were deceiving people. But in reference to some believers who were false prophets, they were deceiving the people into believing that God wanted to forsake His covenant with the existing holy nation of Christians in order to restore the state of national Israel. If this indeed were the plan of God, then none of the false prophets would have been deceivers. They would have been speaking the truth if God did intend to establish again the state of Israel. But because God was finished with Israel proclaims the fact that any prophet is false

if he or she would declare that God wants to again establish the state of Israel in Palestine.

The same is true today. Those who proclaim that God is establishing the Jews in Palestine as a God-ordained nation are deceived, and thus are false prophets who are deceiving others. The wars that surround Israel today have nothing to do with any efforts on the part of God to restore the nation of Israel within their own land.

When Jesus exhorted *“that you be not troubled,”* He indicated that this message was to those of the first century. Christians should not be troubled by any war, but in this historical context Jesus was specifically encouraging the Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire during the middle 60s to not allow Rome’s wars throughout the Empire to disturb them. The only way that Jewish Christians could do this was that they had to understand that the end of national Israel was in the eternal plan of God. God wanted to usher in His gospel covenant relationship with all people through His only begotten Son. The day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 was the beginning. It was on that day that one could obey the gospel in order to come into Christ. And when in Christ *“there is neither Jew nor Greek”* (Gl 3:28).

The Jewish Christians of the time needed to realize that their Jewish nationality was dissolved when they obeyed the gospel in order to come into Christ. They could remain Jews culturally, but their unique covenant relationship with God was terminated in Christ.

The promise of the new covenant has been fulfilled (See Jr 31:31-33). We need to remember that before creation God had planned that all those who obeyed the gospel would come into a covenant relationship with Him in Christ (See Gl 3:26,27). This was in His plan when He established a national covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai. But even at that time, He had in His eternal plan a new covenant that would be revealed by His Son.

The early Christians were not to be troubled, therefore, when and how God would bring to a close

the book on national Israel, though the book on the old Sinai covenant had been closed at the cross (See Cl 2:14). Israel's independent possession of the land of Palestine had been terminated with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Israel will never again enjoy the possession of the land, and thus have a God-ordained right to possess the land of Palestine as a people. They would remain Jews with a covenant with God, but not be in possession of the land.

In the context of Matthew 24, Jesus was giving pronouncements of prophecy that would be spoken among the Jewish disciples throughout the Roman Empire. Jewish Christians were to take heed to these prophetic utterances. If they did not, then they might continue to cling to the traditional Jewish Passover and Pentecost journey to Jerusalem. Some would succumb to the nationalistic Judaism of the day and eventually be trapped in Jerusalem when the Roman armies came for the final onslaught against the insurrectionists. We must keep in mind that many Jewish Christians still had family members living in Palestine.

One reason Jesus gave these warnings, therefore, was primarily for the sake of the early Jewish Christians. They must take heed to these warnings and stay away from Jerusalem when the hour approached. In view of what the historian Josephus wrote concerning the death toll in the final months of war against the city, Jesus' warnings in this text were given to save lives. Some Jewish sons who had been deceived into believing the radical judaizers could be spared if they gave heed to these warnings and stayed away from Palestine.

### **Verse 7**

#### **The Consequences Of War**

***“For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.”***

Because of the many conflicts that existed throughout the Roman Empire in the decade of the 60s, Rome's intolerance toward any who would cause civil disorder, especially those who would promote an insurrectionist movement to break away from the control of Rome, was only intensified. But within the government in Rome there was also internal conflict. In the two-year period that led up to the destruction of Jerusalem, after Nero committed suicide, Galba, Otho and Vitellius came and went in their efforts to seize power in order to become Caesar of Rome. Jewish insurrectionist movements occurred throughout the Empire. At one time about 50,000 Jews were killed in an insurrectionist movement in Seleucia. Another similar movement led to the death of about 20,000 nationalistic Jews in Caesarea who sought to initiate the establishment of an independent Israel. But all was to no avail.

**Famines** occurred throughout the Empire prior to A.D. 70. Agabus had prophesied of one in Acts 11:28. Paul dealt with another in Judea for which the church in other areas took up a contribution (See 1 Co 16:1-3).

In conjunction with the famines, **earthquakes** seem to have plagued the Mediterranean area in the years prior to A.D. 70. Ancient historians record at least eight major earthquakes in the Middle East in the few years before A.D. 70. However, though an earthquake is emotionally unsettling, such natural occurrences should never be used as an indication of God supernaturally working in the affairs of this world. Hundreds of thousands of earthquakes have occurred since Jesus referred to them in the discourse of Matthew 24. But since *"famines and earthquakes in various places"* is a common occurrence in the tectonic movement of geological plates throughout the world, such should never be considered a "sign of the times." (Sometimes people need to turn off their TVs and radios and live with what is happening within their own regions.)

Luke recorded that Jesus also said in this context that **pestilence**, or disease and plagues, would prevail.

Such pestilence and disease usually accompany famines. Pestilence would intensify the trauma of the wars and the harsh circumstances under which some Christians had to live. These would not be “signs of the times,” but suffering that would prevail during the years leading up to the end.

## **Verse 8**

### **The Beginning Of Sorrows**

*“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”*

The events that are discussed in verses 6 and 7 would be only the **beginning of the sorrows**. They would not be “signs of the time” of the end. The intense sorrows and suffering that would come from the battles would add to the conflicts of the time. The battles would continue until the fall of Masada in A.D. 73. It would be in that battle that over nine hundred Jews—men, women and children—would commit suicide instead of being captured by the Romans.

Unfortunately, the disciples would have to live in the turmoil of these sorrows. They could not escape their social environment. Christians must often live in hostile environments that are against the message of peace that they preach. The environments are hostile simply because Satan is the prince of this world. He has deceived the masses of humanity.

However, on the positive side of a hostile environment there is the opportunity for Christians to reveal to the unbelievers around them that they truly live the gospel that brings peace of mind. When in the hostile environment of a Roman prison at the beginning of the decade of the 60s, Paul wrote,

***Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*** (Ph 4:6,7).

In his account of these matters, Luke also added

that “*great signs from heaven*” would be seen (Lk 21:11). This would possibly be the unusual occurrence of terrestrial phenomena that some would interpret as “signs of the end.”

Most of the research speculation concerning terrestrial phenomena during the crucifixion of Jesus assumes that the events of the day of crucifixion took place in the year A.D. 33. However, according to our calendar today, Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30.

We must not forget that Jesus’ statements concerning the termination of national Israel were made in the latter part of His ministry, and before His death. In reference to His teaching through the parables, He spoke of the end of Israel throughout His ministry. All the terrestrial phenomena began to occur on the very day of His crucifixion. On the crucifixion day, the gospel recorders wrote, “*It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour*” (Lk 23:44; see Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33). There was also a great earthquake on that day (See Mt 27:54).

We would conclude, therefore, that the natural phenomena that occurred during the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were signs that the end of national Israel was literally coming, though the end was not demonstrated until forty years later. God was patient with the Jews in order to give them every opportunity to believe on Jesus as the Messiah, and thus obey the gospel.

Since Jesus made the statements concerning the end before these events occurred, then we assume that He did not want the disciples to assume that the end of national Israel occurred at the time of His death. In the anxiety of the day, He did not want them to conclude that the end of His earthly ministry was also the end of Israel. The end of national Israel would come forty years later, but the time of the crucifixion and resurrection was the beginning of the gospel dispensation. Throughout the seven weeks between Passover (the crucifixion) and Pentecost (the announcement of His kingdom reign), Jesus focused

the disciples' minds on their mission of preaching the gospel to the world (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16).

The good news included their being set free from the Sinai covenant and law at the cross (See Cl 2:14). But there was still the unbelieving Jews who needed a clear signal that God was finished with Israel. He gave the unbelieving Jews a chance to first hear and obey the gospel of the Messiah. But after forty years it was time to bring down the curtain on Judaism and national Israel.

## **Verse 9** **Hated For Jesus' Name Sake**

*“Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.”*

Luke is more descriptive in his record. Before the finality of “these things”—the destruction of Jerusalem—he wrote,

*They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake* (Lk 21:12).

The early Christians would be persecuted in their efforts to live and preach the gospel (See Mt 10:17). Because of His mention of “synagogues,” Jesus was certainly talking about the persecution of the early disciples by Jewish religious leaders. This is exactly what happened in the early missions of the disciples. There are a number of accounts in the document of Acts that detail the Jews persecution of the early disciples as they went forth to preach the gospel (See Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-40; 8:3,4; 12:1-5; 16:23; 21:33-40; 24:23-27; 28:30).

If the gospel were true, then it meant the end of Israel as a special people in a covenant relationship with God. The Jews knew enough about the teaching of Christians to realize this. If the gospel were true, then Jesus was the only Messiah that God would send (See At 4:12). An opportunity to consolidate the

Jews around the hope of a coming messiah that was yet in the future was hopeless. In fact, according to Josephus, during the final days of the fall of Jerusalem different individuals withdrew into the temple and tried to give the people hope by rallying them around themselves as the messiah. But all was to no avail.

It is worthy of note that Mark recorded that this discourse was delivered privately to Peter, James, John and Andrew (See Mk 13:3). James would be the first apostle to be martyred (See At 12:1-5). Peter and the others would suffer extensively at the hands of the persecuting Jews in the years to come. John, James' brother, would possibly have been the last apostle to die after being exiled by Rome to the island of Patmos (See Rv 1:9).

All the disciples were **hated** by the persecuting Jews because what the Christians believed meant the end of Israel. They were hated because of the disciples' preaching that Jesus was the Messiah and that there were no more messiahs to come. If Jesus were the only Messiah, then the nationalistic Jews had no future messiah around whom they could rally the people against Rome.

Unfortunately, the hate of the nationalistic Jews would not match that which would later be heaped upon Christians by the end of the first century. Rome would eventually unleash its state persecution against the disciples when the Roman state charged that Christians were also insurrections because they would not confess Caesar as lord.

When Nero was Caesar at the beginning of the 60s, he launched in Rome a personal vendetta against those who had submitted to the Lord Jesus only. But this was only the beginning of Roman persecution against Christians. The personal vendetta of Nero eventually grew into state persecution by the end of the first century. This "hate" had been spoken before by the Lord.

*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the*



*world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn 15:18,19; see At 7:59; 12:2; 16:23; 18:12; 24:26; 28:17-22).

Persecution of the early Christians would become so prevalent that the early evangelists exhorted and comforted the newly established disciples with the teaching that they would suffer for their faith. Paul wrote to Timothy during these years of turmoil, ***“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”*** (2 Tm 3:12). Paul and Barnabas strengthened and exhorted the disciples by saying, ***“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”*** (At 14:22).

The religious world was hostile to Christianity because the gospel nullified the very foundation upon which self-sanctifying religion is based. Since the world is full of religion, then the full strength of misguided religionists will launch all sorts of persecution against those who preach the gospel of God’s grace.

Jesus explained the reason why religious people would do such to those who seek to live according to the gospel message that only in Jesus one can be reconciled to God.

*These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me* (Jn 16:1-3).

## **A. The First Wave Of Persecution**

There were two forces that led in the persecution of the early Christians in the first century. The first was Jewish persecution that was instigated by self-righteous religionists as Saul before his obedience to the gospel (See At 9:1-30). This persecution eventually extended throughout many cities of the Roman Empire. As a note of explanation, Saul was initially a part of the religion of the Jews (See Gl 1:13,14). And as a religionist, he viewed Christianity as a sect of people who denied the foundation upon

which the Jews' religion was founded.

**Religion exists because it is inherently built upon the foundation of religious traditions that identify each unique religion** (See Mk 7:1-9). Religion is a system of faith whereby the adherents seek to sanctify themselves of sin through the performance of certain rites and rituals that identify each particular religion.

Gospel, on the other hand, is defined in one statement that makes the gospel totally contrary to that which identifies religion: Christians *“are not under law, but under grace”* (Rm 6:14). The gospel of grace, therefore, sets one free from religion (See Gl 5:1). And since gospel sets one free from religion, those who are the leaders of any particular religion set themselves against those who preach the gospel. This is especially true if the leaders of the religion are fully supported by the adherents of the religion.

Since no one can be justified before God through perfect law-keeping, then religion, which is based on strict adherence to the traditions (laws) of the religion, **cannot justify one before God**. In the case of the Jews, their strict adherence to the law of God could not justify them before God (See Gl 2:16). Obedience to the many rites and rituals of the Jews' religion could not atone for one's sin. No one through law-keeping can be justified before God because everyone continues to sin (See Rm 3:23; 6:23).

In contrast to religion, Christians have been set free from perfect obedience to the assumed rites and rituals of any religion. The justified are set free in their obedience to the gospel of grace. Therefore, that which stirred up the persecution from religionists worldwide was the fact that what identified a religion is totally contrary to the central principle of grace that identifies Christianity. There can never be any harmony between any religion and the gospel. The two are inherently opposed to one another. Religion is essentially people trying to do what Jesus did completely at the cross.

## **B. The Second Wave Of Persecution**

The second wave of persecution that was eventually launched against Christians was carried out by the head of the Roman Empire. Nero initially launched his personal vendetta against Christians in the middle 60s. However, all historical evidence indicates that this persecution was localized in and around Rome, and was terminated when Nero committed suicide. It was not until the reign of Domitian the latter part of the first century that Roman state persecution was launched against Christians throughout the Empire.

In Rome's early persecutions of Jews, the Roman state made little distinction between Jews of Judaism and Jewish Christians. Jewish Christians were only considered a sect of Judaism. And since Judaism was causing the incessant problems in Palestine, Rome launched reprisals against all Jews, regardless of whether they were Christians.

It is also significant to note from the context of Matthew 24, and the context of John 16:1-3, that persecution would come from those who were religionists, and thus, believed they were serving God by persecuting Christians. Even Rome's persecution that began the latter part of the first century was instituted by religious leaders of the Roman religion.

Persecution of Christians rarely comes from the state alone. It is usually generated by religions within the state that use the state to dispel competitive religions. Sometimes, the false religions of men will use the power of the state in order to persecute the true church of God. When a religion uses the state to persecute Christians, then we know that the religion is false.

In any state that is theocratic, the civil and religious laws of the state are one. There is no separation between state and religion. In such a situation, any religion that would arise that is contrary to the established religious laws of the state is considered treason. The early disciples would eventually move into a somewhat theocratic state that Rome seemed to become.

Since Christians would not call Caesar "lord," they

were accused of insurrection, and thus enemies of the state. The book of Revelation would take the early disciples through the onslaught of state persecution. Jesus would not leave the Christians of the second and third centuries without hope of deliverance from Roman state persecution. And because He would not, **He called on John to pen the visions of Revelation in order to prepare Christians that they would endure persecution for the next 150 years until Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311.**

## **Verse 10**

### **The Offended And The Betrayed**

*“And then many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another.”*

Those of weak faith who were **offended** in being associated with the incarnate Son of God, or who were ashamed of His gospel (See Rm 1:16), would succumb to the intimidation of those who were recruiting for the establishment of an independent nation of Israel. It would be a time when Jewish Christians would be embarrassed about their loyalty to King Jesus, as opposed to giving in to the intimidation of the nationalistic Jews who sought to establish a Jewish state. Even the hate of some nationalistic Jewish Christians would be revealed in their desire to disassociate with fellow Jewish Christians. The faith of Christians would be hated because they did not join in with those Jews who sought to establish a Jewish homeland.

In reference to betrayal, we would rightly conclude that some sons who were recruited by nationalistic Jews would have betrayed their fathers and mothers in order to sneak off to Palestine in order to join the resistance. Friendships would be betrayed as the recruited would turn away from those friends who would not give in to the persuasion of the nationalistic Jewish recruiters who were deceiving young men into

joining the ranks of the resistance against Rome.

Jesus said, *“Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me”* (Mt 11:6). Luke records the extent to which some would go in their betrayal of others. *“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death”* (Lk 21:16). What Jesus here prophesied is that which Paul wrote to Timothy would happen in the decade of the 60s. *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tm 3:12).

When understood in the historical context of the decade that led up to the final conflict in Palestine, the prophecy of Jesus could be understood better in reference to death in the futile effort to establish a Jewish state within Palestine. If a Christian Jew were recruited by a nationalistic Jewish zealot, then it would be the same as sending one to his own death in Jerusalem. If Josephus' figures are anywhere correct, hundreds of thousands of recruited Jews were sent to their death during the conflicts that prevailed throughout Palestine, and eventually in the final battles that brought down Jerusalem and Masada between A.D. 70 and 73.

It is true that the first disciples were persecuted unto death during the Roman state persecution that began the latter part of the first century (See Rv 2:10). However, in the following promise Jesus spoke directly to His apostles. He promised that He would through the Holy Spirit reveal to them what to say when on trial.

*Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist* (Lk 21:14,15).

There is a practical principle here we must not overlook. Those who would take a stand for the truth of the gospel will be persecuted by the deceived. One might say that persecution is a part of the evangelistic package. When one preaches the gospel, Satan will not be silent, for the gospel is totally contrary to

his system of religious deception. He will not stand easy as his kingdom is ravaged by the truth of the gospel. The evangelist who goes forth and finds it surprising that there are those religiously misguided people who oppose him, has much to learn about the conflict between good and evil in this world. He or she has a great deal to learn in the fact that the gospel is inherently opposed to religion. Those who would seek to sustain their religion will certainly persecute those who come with a message of freedom from the bondage of religion.

But in the historical context of Jesus' prophecies concerning the consummation of national Israel, there was more involved than individual persecution that resulted from preaching the gospel. Jews were being recruited to join the hope of establishing an independent Jewish state in Palestine. If one allowed himself to be deceived into joining this fruitless hope, then it was as a sentence to death.

## **Verse 11** **False Prophets**

*“And many false prophets will arise and will deceive many.”*

This statement does not assume that the false prophets would come from within the fellowship of the saints. On the contrary, Jesus said that false prophets would simply arise. In the historical context it is not difficult to assume who these false prophets would be. **They would be those deceivers within Judaism who would eventually arise to call for the establishment of a Jewish state within Palestine.** They would deceive the Jews, both believing and unbelieving throughout the Roman Empire to go to Palestine in order to inaugurate the state of national Israel. Nevertheless, from what Paul said in Galatians 2:4 there seem to have been such false Jewish “brethren” early in the history of the church *“who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus.”*

Their call for recruits would be false since God had determined that Israel was forever dissolved in Christ. There would never again be a nation of Israel within Palestine to which Jews should be called. The prophets who proclaim such today are false because they also make such a claim.

The subject of deception is continued by Jesus in the Matthew 24 context since this was paramount to the social chaos that was created by Jews with nationalistic motives. Jesus understood the fickle nature of people who desire to follow after iconic leaders. He knew the “sheep nature” of people to seek for a shepherd (See Mk 6:34). In this case, they were seeking for a “messiah” who would lead them to throw off the bondage of Roman rule.

This urge to seek for a shepherd is so strong that innocent, if not gullible people, would follow after any self-proclaimed prophet who might show some religious inclinations and leadership. This would especially be true in reference to nationalistic Jews who believed in the deliverance of Israel from the dominance of Rome.

Jesus knew that there would be those who would take advantage of the innocence of the sheep. Therefore, He warned His disciples that **false prophets** would come to call the saints back into Judaism. Whenever there are times of social chaos within a nation or society, there are always those who will take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the people. Jesus warned, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Mt 7:15). These imposters would often practice sorcery, astonishing the people with their religious performances, and claim that they were someone great (See At 8:9-11).

In reference to the community of believers, Paul warned that from the leadership of the church *“men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (At 20:30). There would be those who would go about from city to city, deceiving and being deceived. He warned, *“For such*

*are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ”* (2 Co 11:13).

Just in case we might assume that such roving propheteers are unique in this gospel era, Peter reminded his readers concerning what happened in Israel centuries before the coming of Christ:

*But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], even as there will be false teachers among you [as Christians], who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord [Jesus Christ] who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction [in the consummation of national Israel]. And many [deceived Christian Jews] will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth [of the gospel] will be blasphemed* (2 Pt 2:1,2; see Gl 1:6-9; 1 Tm 4:1-4; 2 Tm 3:1-9; 1 Jn 4:1; Jd 11,16).

The fact that both Jesus and the inspired writers warned of false prophets is enough to alert us to always be on guard against such. The only way to be on guard is to know well that which protects us against erroneous teachings. We must know Jesus. We must believe that He is the incarnate Son of God. John exhorted, *“Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 Jn 4:1). Since John wrote these words over two thousand years ago, we must assume that there are still those who are going about as false prophets of religions that they have created after their own traditions. **Biblically ignorant people do not guard against false prophets. If one does not know Jesus through the medium of the word of God, then he or she does not know Him as the Son of God.**

In these times today, there are many who proclaim “Jesus,” but they have little knowledge of the Bible. They are often led to be ignorant of the word of God because their teachers know little about the Bible.

There are a number of religions throughout the world today. However, we must not forget that religion is not based on the word of God as the foundation of faith. In a religion, the Bible is never the final authority



in matters of faith. A religion is based on tradition and some system of self-sanctification that has become the heritage of the adherents' faith.

We must not forget that unique religious groups are unique because of their unique traditions and beliefs that separate them from one another. The gospel usually has a difficult time penetrating religion because people treasure their religious heritage of traditions more than the authority of the word of God.

## **Verse 12**

### **Lawless And Loveless Societies**

*“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”*

When people do not submit to the laws of either God or man, human relationships digress to instincts of survival. There is no love of one's neighbor in a state of social anarchy. For this reason, God ordained the civil law of government.

***Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority [of government] resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves*** (Rm 13:1,2).

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit wrote these words directly to Jewish Christians who were living in the seat of the “government authorities” who would, in about fifteen years from the time of writing, sign the decree to squash the aspirations of the Jewish nationalists in Palestine. Romans 13:1,2, therefore, was written as a warning in order to remind the Jewish Christians in Rome to stay away from the Jewish nationalists who were about to rise up in the Roman Empire.

Resistance against God-ordained government is exactly what the nationalistic Jews did, and subsequently brought upon themselves the God-

ordained consummation of national Israel. Because the nationalistic Jews continually fought against the control of Rome, Rome eventually unleashed her judgment upon the anarchists. The nationalistic Jews were anarchist in reference to their submission to the state of Rome, but antichrist in reference to their submission to King Jesus.

In preparing Timothy for the dark days that were coming, Paul reminded the young evangelist, *“The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane”* (1 Tm 1:9). These words were written in the decade of the 60s with the behavior of the anarchist Jews in mind.

We must not think that Rome arbitrarily unleashed her military on the Jews. There was a reason, and that reason was the insurrectionist behavior of the nationalistic zealots of Judaism. The annual Passover / Pentecost feast became the gathering point of these insurrectionists. And thus, it was during the Passover / Pentecost feast that the Roman army arrived in Palestine in order to put down insurrectionist Jews who permeated the Empire.

Since the nationalistic Jews had been recruiting for an inevitable confrontation with the Romans, the Romans wanted to have as many of the nationalistic Jews as possible gathered in one place before they encircled them in Jerusalem. It was actually a stroke of military genius on the part of the Roman army, specifically Vespasian who was the general of the army at the time these events were initiated.

In times of social chaos it is easy to fall from loving one's neighbor as himself. Social chaos generates hate, and hate generates disobedience of law. In times of military conflict, the struggles of the time generate a sense of self-preservation. And when self-preservation kicks in, love of one's neighbor is gone. When people refuse to submit to the authority of government, they will not submit to the needs of one another. Love grows cold and lawlessness abounds in times of war.

## **Verse 13**

### **Endure To The End**

*“But he who will endure to the end, the same will be saved.”*

The commentary on this statement was written by an unknown writer, possibly Paul, who wrote on this subject sometime during the decade of the 60s. The theme of this commentary was based on an exhortation not to turn away from King Jesus as the Christ and Savior of the world.

The Hebrew writer argued persuasively in Hebrews in order to dissuade some Christians from turning from Jesus in order to revert to the Jews' religion. In those days, there was a tremendous amount of nationalistic intimidation of Jewish Christians to join the resistance. Nationalistic Jews were intimidating Jewish Christians to return to the religion of their heritage in order to establish again the Jewish state in Palestine. But at the conclusion of all his arguments that turning from Jesus would produce only condemnation in the eyes of God (See Hb 2:2,3), the Hebrew writer confidently affirmed, ***“We are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”*** (Hb 10:39). Therefore, the Hebrew writer exhorted, ***“Let us hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised”*** (Hb 10:23).

Those who remained faithful while in the midst of either persecution or nationalistic intimidation would be delivered from the end of national Israel (See Rv 2:10). They would be spared from the genocide of thousands that took place during the months of conflict in Palestine (See Mt 10:22). Jesus even promised faithful Christians, ***“But not a hair of your head will be lost”*** in the destruction if they stayed away from Palestine in those days (Lk 21:18).

However, the condition for not becoming a victim of the national calamity that was coming was to take heed to Jesus' warning: ***“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape***

*all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man*” (Lk 21:36). They could only escape if they refrained from joining the resistance. They must stay away from Palestine, and Jerusalem in particular.

We can now see why Jesus was giving these immediate disciples this information. Those who believed His pronouncements would not fall victim to the God-ordained consummation of national Israel. The faithful would save their lives if they heeded these warnings. Those Jewish Christians who were still clinging to their Jewish heritage had to make a decision. They had to decide to relinquish loyalty to Jewish nationalism by clinging to King Jesus. The entire document of Hebrews was written in order to present the gospel journey of the Son of God to those Jewish Christians who were tempted to turn from King Jesus. If they forsook the King and Priest, there was no hope for them.

We can see in the contexts of Jesus’ discourse here why Jerusalem and the temple had to go. There was too much Jewish sentimentality connected to both the city and the temple. For forty years from the time of the cross in A.D. 30 until the year A.D. 70, God had been patient with Israel. By A.D. 70 it was time to cut the emotional umbilical cord with Judaism, Jerusalem, and thus the Sinai covenant. Jewish Christians had to move on. They had to move on to a faith that was neither culturally nor nationalistically linked.

There had to be a sign from God that He was finished with the Sinai covenant and national Israel. This sign had to be so convincing that the unbelieving Jews of the time would question their own faith, and thus realize that Jesus was truly the Messiah. This would be what Paul defined as the “fullness” (fulfillment) of Israel. It would be at this time when Jesus said, *“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43). The consummation would prove that God was no longer with the nation of Israel, no matter how patriotic most Jews were to establish again an independent nation in Palestine.

In the following words, Paul released the following revelation concerning the “fullness” about fifteen years before the events of A.D. 70:

*I say then, have they [the Jews] stumbled that they should fall [through unbelief]? Certainly not! But rather through their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to provoke them [the Jews] to jealousy. Now if their transgression [through unbelief] is the riches of the [Gentile] world, and the diminishing [destruction] of them [as a nation of believers] the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness [when God finalizes His work through Israel] (Rm 11:11,12)?*

The rejection of the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, spurred the early evangelists to move on to the Gentiles. When the Jews “*resisted and blasphemed, he [Paul] shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads. I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’*” (At 18:6; see At 13:46-48; 28:28). And so he and the other evangelists, as they spread out across the world, preached the gospel to the Gentiles.

## **Verse 14**

### **Preaching To The Empire**

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world [of the Roman Empire] for a witness to all nations, and then will the end [of national Israel] come.”*

The good news of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coronation of the Son of God would be preached to Gentiles in all parts of the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

“**All the world**” is here certainly a reference to the Roman Empire as the phrase is so used in Luke 2:1: “*And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that **all the world** should be registered.*” This was not a registration of the inhabitants of the entire world. The idiomatic expression “all the world” referred only to those of the world who were under Roman jurisdiction. This same

meaning is in Romans 1:8: *“I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”* The Roman Christians’ faith was certainly not spoken of throughout the rest of the geographical world. Reference to “the whole world” is again to the perimeters or jurisdiction of the Roman Empire.

In Romans 10:18 Paul does use the phrase “all the earth,” or “ends of the world,” to refer to the whole world. He wrote, *“Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”* We must keep in mind that Romans 10:18 was a quotation from Psalm 19:4. In prophetic language it is stated in the **past tense**. Paul quoted this passage in the **past tense** as it was written by David. This does not mean, therefore, that at the time Paul quoted Psalm 19 in Romans 10 that it had been **completely fulfilled**. In Romans 15:29,24-28 Paul desired to go to Spain and preach the gospel. The gospel had evidently not yet gone to Spain at the time he quoted Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18. Therefore, when he made the statement of Romans 10:18, the gospel at the time of his writing the letter of Romans had not yet gone to “all the earth” or “ends of the world.”

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, we would understand that the meaning of the phrase “all the world” refers to the Roman Empire. The practical reason for the preaching of the gospel to the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem is obvious. During Passover and Pentecost Jews of the Roman Empire would make the long journey to Jerusalem to celebrate these two great Jewish feasts.

On the particular Passover and Pentecost of the Acts 2 events, there were Jews in Jerusalem from the eastern extent of the Roman Empire, that is, Parthia and Media (modern-day Iran). There were Jews from the southern extent of the Roman Empire in North Africa. There were Jews from all Asia and Italy. This journey to Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost was a very precious thing in the lives of devout Jews. For this reason, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem at

least ten years after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, for they were still there even to the meeting of Acts 15. **They stayed in order to receive and evangelize each annual group of Jews who journeyed to the city for the Passover / Pentecost Feast.**

In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, Jesus was warning the disciples of the Roman Empire in order to **save their lives**. When the gospel was preached to the Jewish inhabitants of the Roman Empire, they gave up the Sinai law that stated that Jewish males must be in Jerusalem on Passover and Pentecost (See Ex 12; 23:14-19; Nm 9:1-14). Those Jews who obeyed the gospel would be taught the prophecy of Matthew 24. They would thus stay away from Jerusalem in the years to come, **because they understood that they were not longer under the old covenant law that Jewish males must show up in Jerusalem for the Passover / Pentecost feast.**

When the Romans did come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they came on Passover and Pentecost. Those Jewish Christians who lived outside Judea believed the message of Matthew 24, and thus, **were not there**. Their lives were spared because they believed Jesus and His prophecy concerning the consummation of national Israel.

We could correctly conclude, therefore, that the events that transpired in A.D. 70 were the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of such, and thus, the final proof that He was the Messiah and Son of God.

## **Verses 15-18**

### **The Abomination Of Desolation**

*“Therefore, when you see **the abomination of desolation** [the Gentile Roman army] that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place—whoever reads, let him understand—then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Nor let him who is in the field go back to get his clothes.”*

The **abomination of desolation** would be the

pagan Roman army in Judea. The Gentile army would be there to desecrate the temple. The Gentiles' presence would be an abomination to the Jews. However, all this would be the will of God, who was by the proxy of Rome, bringing judgment on Israel by the power of the Roman armies. Luke recorded, *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation [consummation] is near”* (Lk 21:20).

Daniel had prophesied of this event in Daniel 9 & 11. Jesus was saying, therefore, that we must understand that **the A.D. 70 event was the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy** (See Mk 13:14). This fulfillment was **near**, not over two thousand years in the future. Daniel prophesied,

*And the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it will be with a flood, and until the end of the war desolations are determined* (Dn 9:26).

Daniel continued by prophesying that forces *“will defile the sanctuary fortress; then they will take away the daily sacrifices and place there the abomination of desolation”* (Dn 11:31; see Dn 12:7-11). *“And there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”* (Dn 12:1).

At the beginning of this time of destruction, the resident Jewish Christians of Judea must **flee**. They must take heed to Jesus' warnings in order to understand that the nationalistic aspirations of the Jews was futile. It was in the final plan of God to openly demonstrate that He had finished with Israel when the unbelieving Jews crucified His Son on the cross.

The urgency by which Judean Christians must flee is here revealed. In the ancient cities one could actually go from house to house on the roof tops of the houses. The houses were joined together so that one could simply go from one roof to another. In order to accentuate the urgency of fleeing, Jesus said that they must not take the time to return to their houses for coveted possessions when they see the chance



to escape. They must flee with what they have in hand.

Jesus also warned that no one was to go to Judea during these days (See Lk 21:21). This warning was possibly to those who might travel to Judea and Jerusalem to visit friends and family, and then be caught in the war that was to rage throughout Judea. Jesus' warning, therefore, was to save lives, the lives of those Jewish Christians who might still be tempted to travel to Jerusalem to visit family and friends during the annual Passover / Pentecost feast.

After Vespasian returned to Rome to be Caesar, the Roman army was placed under the control of Titus, his son. For some reason during the final stages of the assault on Jerusalem, Titus removed his encircling army from the city for a brief period of time. This gave all resident Christians of Jerusalem time to flee. This was possibly the time when Jesus said that they must not come down from their roof tops, but flee immediately. They must take this window of opportunity and flee the city. Only the radical insurrectionists Jews would stay in the city. This may have been the reason why Titus allowed an interlude in the assault against the city. We may assume that this was in the plan of God in order to deliver His people from the calamity.

In the prophecy of Matthew 24, Jesus issued every warning possible to keep the Jewish Christians out of Palestine. But then there were those Jewish Christians who lived in Judea and the city of Jerusalem who would probably be reluctant to leave their homes and flee. This would be particularly true of those Jewish Christians who had unbelieving family members who would not heed the warning of the One they believed was a self-proclaimed Messiah. For this reason, it was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to leave unbelieving family and friends. In His discourse of Matthew 24, Jesus gave some final signs in order that they might save their own lives. When they saw the Roman army outside the walls of the city, then they must conclude that it was all over. Jesus was

the rightful Messiah, but the nationalistic Jews had deceived the people into believing that He was not, having crucified Him instead.

## **Verses 19,20**

### **Pray For An Easy Flight**

*“And woe to those who are with child and to those who are nursing infants in those days. But pray that your flight not be in the winter or on the Sabbath.”*

It would be difficult for pregnant women to flee during a war. In fact, Paul wrote to those throughout Achaia that it would not be wise to even marry during times of distress (See 1 Co 7:26). He may have given this advice in view of the conflict that was either present or coming in reference to the Jews' efforts to establish an independent state of Israel in Palestine.

Those with small nursing babies would also have difficulty in the flight from Judea. The prayers of the saints evidently were certainly a determining factor as to when this destruction would occur, for Jesus asked them to pray that such not happen in winter when the journey of flight would be more difficult. They must also pray that their flight not begin on the Sabbath, for fanatical nationalistic Jews would close the city gates on the Sabbath and hinder any from making any efforts to leave the city. Some fanatical Jews would possibly confront them in reference to violating the “Sabbath day journey” of Judaism (See Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26; 6:1-5).

The prayers of the saints would determine much concerning the deliverance of the Christians. Though we might not understand how God answered these prayers, the fact that Jesus asked them to pray for these things says **that God can work in areas for which Jesus asked His disciples to pray.**

## **Verse 21**

### **Great Tribulation**

*“For then there will be great tribulation [because of the conflict],*

*such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever will.”*

Daniel prophesied that no nation from the beginning of time would have suffered as Israel was about to suffer at the hand of the Roman army. He wrote, *“And there will be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation”* (Dn 12:1; see Dn 9:26). The siege occurred during Passover / Pentecost feast, the time when the most “faithful,” or at least fanatical Jews were in Jerusalem. These Jews were trapped in the city. Thousands perished. The rest were sold into slavery. It was a time when an entire nation suffered more in just a few months than any nation before them in such a short time. The genocide of the time was overwhelming, and thus, meant the termination of a nation.

The Romans wasted no time in the conquest of Jerusalem. It is believed that the actual battle against Jerusalem lasted only three to five months. During this time hundreds of thousands of nationalistic Jews were slaughtered. No city from the beginning of time suffered such a fate as national Israel in A.D. 70.

## **Verse 22**

### **For The Sake Of The Christians**

*“And except those days [of the conflict] were shortened, no life would be saved. But for the elect’s sake, those days will be shortened.”*

God would shorten **those days** of the war for the sake of the Jewish Christians throughout the world. If the rate of killing the Jews continued that went on during the battle, the slaughter of all Jews throughout the Roman Empire would have resulted in their annihilation as a race of people. The killing would have spilled over into the community of Christian Jews. But for the sake of the Christian Jews, God would not allow the killing to continue past the genocide of Jerusalem and Masada. Therefore, the destruction was contained within Palestine.

The commander of the Roman army, Titus, expedited the battle against Jerusalem in order to hurry back to Rome. However, the battle continued for about five months. Josephus records that the Roman army crucified about 30,000 Jews outside the city walls. Titus did such in order to discourage the Jews within the city, and thus, expedite their surrender. But the Jews persisted until he had to destroy the city, even the temple. Subsequently, in the genocide hundreds of thousands of Jews died.

## **Verse 23**

### **False Proclamations**

*“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ or ‘There,’ do not believe it.”*

Jesus again emphasized the concept that the Jewish believers not be led astray by the deceptions of false messiahs. In times of national trauma, He knew that the people would seek for a national savior. There would be those nationalistic deliverers who would stand up and seek to lead the Jews of the Roman Empire in an effort to continue the nation of Israel. Jesus tells the disciples not to follow such futile calls for the national restitution of the state of Israel. He would say the same today who call for the restoration of a Jewish state within the confines of Palestine.

When the disciples later asked in Acts 1:6, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel,”* Jesus knew that they still retained nationalistic hopes, and thus, did not fully understand what He had previously revealed in context of the Matthew 24 speech. In the context of Matthew 24, therefore, He gave them divine instructions upon which they could reflect when the countdown started forty years later in A.D. 70. They could reflect on what Jesus said in His prophecy of Matthew 24 and know that His intention was not to establish a physical kingdom reign here on earth. **This was never His intention.** He clearly stated to Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (Jn

18:36). If His kingdom were of this world, then His disciples would have the right to take up arms against all those who persecuted them (See Jn 18:36).

It will not be Jesus' intention to establish an earthly kingdom when He comes again. If it were His intention to establish an earthly kingdom when He comes, then He would contradict what He said to Pilate. Jesus' kingdom reign was always planned to be from heaven. Futile hopes that He will come again in order to use a military to establish an earthly kingdom is totally contrary to the gospel of His present reign as King of kings.

## **Verse 24** **False Messiahs**

*“For there will arise false christs [messiahs] and false prophets. And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*

**False christs** and **prophets** would arise in the time of calamity in order to call people after futile aspirations to establish a Jewish state. They would **show great signs and wonders**. These deceiving tricks would be so good that even Christians might by chance believe them to be real.

These “signs and wonders” could not be real supernatural events simply because Jesus says here that the elect might be **deceived** into believing them to be real. The point is that they would not be deceived if the supposed miracles were true. **One is not deceived when he or she believes that which is true and real.**

This context is similar to Paul's warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9: *“The presence of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all deceiving power and signs and wonders.”* In the 2 Thessalonians text the word “deceiving” would modify power, signs and wonders. All supposed miracles of Satan are false. Those who presume to control the supernatural today to prove themselves and their message to be true are the instruments of Satan.

Paul warns that *“such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ”* (2 Co 11:13). They are not instruments of Satan because they work real miracles. **They are instruments of Satan because they claim that what they do is the miraculous work of either God or Satan.** Jesus warned, **“Be not deceived.”**

Some ask how one can determine if the supposed supernatural work of an individual is true. The answer is simple. **If one is not preaching the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and final consummation of all things, then he or she is a false prophet and his or her signs are fake.** If one does not teach that one must obey the gospel of the incarnate Son of God through baptism for remission of sins, then he is a false prophet and his signs are fake. Upon such masquerading apostles, King Jesus will come with the following judgment:

*... rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Th 1:7,8).

## **Verse 25**

### **Forewarning**

*“Behold, I have told you in advance.”*

Jesus told the disciples these things beforehand in order to prepare them to believe only in Him when it all happened. He made a similar statement in John 13:18 after quoting Psalm 41:9 in reference to the betrayal of Judas: *“Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He”* (Jn 13:19).

The false prophets about whom Jesus spoke existed in the times preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. We do not doubt that they have existed throughout history unto this day. Christians, therefore, would be wise to take heed to Jesus' warning concerning such things. In the same historical context of the decade

that led up to the conflict between Rome and the nationalistic Jews, Peter warned,

*Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words that were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pt 3:1-4).*

Peter personally remembered the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24. He stirred his audience to remembrance by reminding them that they were in the last days about which Jesus spoke. He wrote the letter of 2 Peter between A.D. 65 and 67. This was only a short time before the destruction was to begin.

Peter wrote that Jesus *"was manifest in these last times for you"* (1 Pt 1:20). God *"has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"* (Hb 1:2). This was the *"fullness of the time"* (Gl 4:4) and the *"end of the age"* of God's special covenant with national Israel (See Ep 1:10). It was in these last times of national Israel that God sent forth His Son. The last days did not refer to a dispensation, **but to a time of ending**, the end of national Israel with the revelation of the gospel through the Word who became flesh (See Jn 1:1,2,14).

It was the "last times," the last times of God's Sinai covenant He had specifically with Israel. Jude and James also wrote just a few years before the fall of Jerusalem. Both writers inferred the finality of Israel as a covenanted nation with God. Jude stated,

*Beloved, remember the words that were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts (Jd 17,18).*

Jude's Christian readers were experiencing these mockers in their own lives at the very time he wrote. Therefore, Jude's argument is that his Jewish Christian readers were in the **last time** of national Israel. These

were not the beginning of the last times, but the last time.

The last times were the years between Pentecost in A.D. 30 to A.D. 70. These were the last days of national Israel. God was bringing judgment upon the wicked vine dressers (the Jewish religious leadership) who attempted to steal the fruit and inheritance of the vineyard by maintaining the religion of Judaism (See Mt 21:33-45). National Israel had rejected God, and thus, God was in the process of rejecting national Israel. National Israel's persecution of the "Israel by faith" was coming to an end when national Israel came to an end.

James wrote to suffering Jewish Christians of the Roman Empire around A.D. 62 or 63. He comforted the persecuted "Israel by faith" (the church) by saying, *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.... You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand"* (Js 5:7,8). James was not talking about a "coming of the Lord" more than two thousand years later. Discussion concerning a coming at the end of time would not have been an encouragement to his immediate readers who were suffering under nationalistic Jewish mockers. The "coming" in the context of Matthew 24 is about judgment **in time** upon the nation of Israel. James wrote that this judgment in A.D. 62 or 63 was "at hand."

Nationalistic Jewish mockers were the primary persecutors of Christians before A.D. 70. Jesus' "coming in judgment" upon these mockers was **at hand**, that is, it was near unto happening. In Matthew 24 Jesus was **"telling beforehand"** of this deliverance that was coming in only a few years after James wrote.

Those "end-of-time" proponents today who would reach into this historical contact and twist the Scriptures for their own fantasies have done a disservice to the early Christians. They are prophecy thieves who steal away the encouragement of these prophecies that were meant to encourage the initial



readers to whom they were addressed. They seek to apply the prophecies to themselves and those they have deceived into following them. Prophecy thieves seek to generate an audience for themselves by stealing in-time prophecies in order to apply the same prophecies to end-of-time events.

## **Verses 26,27** **Manifested Presence**

*“Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Behold, He [the Messiah] is in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Behold, He is in the secret chambers,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines even to the west, so also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man.”*

The very fact that Jesus made the prophecy of the end of Israel on the occasion of this discourse is evidence that His prophecy was meant to reveal that He was the Son of God who had all these things under control. After His crucifixion and ascension, He assumed all control over all things when He was seated at the right hand of God, *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come”* (Ep 1:21). **Simply because we do not see all things under His control does not mean that He is not in control** (See Hb 2:8).

All things at the time He made the preceding statement were under His control. Immediately before the betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus knew *“that the Father had given all things into His hands”* (Jn 13:3). He knew He had been given all authority over all things before His ascension (See Mt 28:18). When He ascended to reign, and this prophecy was fulfilled, many of the unbelieving Jews would come to realize that He was made King of kings and Lord of lords at the time of His coronation. The suppression of the nationalistic Jews in A.D. 70 would reaffirm His existing kingdom reign in the age that followed after A.D. 70. In the consummation of national Israel, the whole world had the opportunity to believe that Jesus

was right, and that He would be who He said He was until the consummation of the world.

But before the end of national Israel there were those false christs (messiahs) who led gullible Jews into the wilderness in hope of organizing an independent state of Israel in Palestine. Jesus was here warning the disciples not to accept anyone who would lead them into believing that the Christ would come **in time** in a manner that would be characteristic of His final coming. When Jesus comes at the **end of time** it will not be a happening that must be communicated by people to people. It will be an event that will happen at the **sound** of the last trumpet, with the voice of **an archangel** (See 1 Th 4:15,16). In other words, Jesus says that if others come to say that they are “the Christ,” then they should not believe them. The unbelieving Jews may not have been able to connect all the dots, but at least the Christians of the time would have had their message proven true in the fall of national Israel.

The next personal coming of Jesus will be worldwide and heavenly announced with the sound of a trumpet. As lightning is seen when it strikes, so there will be no need to go forth and proclaim that He had come. All the Jews throughout the world will realize that what Christians spoke on these matters in reference to Jesus being the Messiah had come to pass. But it will be too late for all unbelievers.

## **Verse 28**

### **Gathering Of The Vultures**

*“For wherever the carcass [of dead national Israel] is, there will the vultures be gathered together [to consume it].”*

The **carcass** is the Israelite nation that died forty years before at the cross. When the Jewish religious leaders rejected and crucified the Messiah, they signed their own doom. They died as God’s chosen nation. Therefore, the nation was a dead carcass even before the arrival of the vultures (the Roman army).

It was a dead carcass awaiting its own consumption and consummation.

When the new covenant was bought and paid for by the blood of the incarnate Son of God, the covenant of the blood of bulls and goats passed away (See Hb 10:1-4). When this happened, Jesus wiped **“out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”** (Cl 2:14). This revealing statement about this matter was understood in reference to all those who obeyed the gospel:

***Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the [Sinai] law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God*** (Rm 7:4).

The problem with the nationalistic Jews in the decade leading up to the consumption of the carcass in A.D. 70 was that they had missed the opportunity to be married to the Messiah. In their refusal to be married to Christ through obedience to the gospel, they shunned the King of kings who was in control of all those things that would befall them in A.D. 70.

The gathering “vultures” was the Roman army that came to consume the carcass of a dead nation. Vultures come when they see death. National Israel, therefore, was dead before the vultures arrived on the scene. When the disciples started seeing the gathering of the Roman army into Palestine, they knew that it was mealtime for vultures.

The unfortunate part of this story is that many Jewish Christians were deceived into believing the recruiting Jewish nationalists, and thus they sent themselves to death in the end. Some Jewish Christians had evidently refused to terminate the Passover/ Pentecost journey to Jerusalem to visit family and friends. Jesus was giving everyone warning signs in order to keep themselves away from the area, because the vultures were going to consume the carcass of nationalistic Israel. The vultures showed up over the carcass on the Passover / Pentecost of A.D. 70.

## Verse 29

### End Of Nationalistic Aspirations

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun [of national Israel] will be darkened and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”*

The great tribulation of verse 21 would precede the final destruction of the city. Therefore, **immediately after the tribulation** of those days, the splendor of the Jewish nation would fall by the destruction of Israel’s pride, the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Jesus used **apocalyptic** judgment language from the Old Testament to portray the final doom of Israel. Such language was commonly used by inspired writers in the Old Testament to symbolize the fall of nations (See Is 13:6-18; 14:12; 24:23; 34:4; Jr 4:23,24; Ez 32:7,8; Dn 8:10; Jl 2:30-32). The **sun** usually represented the king or monarch of the nation. The **heavenly bodies** represented the rest of the government leaders.

We must not allow ourselves to become inconsistent in understanding Jesus’ use of metaphorical language in this context to be a literal falling of the sun, moon and stars. We consistently interpret such language as it was used in the Old Testament. **Such language referred to the fall of an earthly kingdom.**

When God **shakes the heavens**, there is great change on earth among the nations. This is the meaning in Haggai 2:6 from which Jesus brought the figure, *“shaking the powers of the heavens”* into the context of the fall of national Israel. Haggai wrote, *“For thus says the Lord of hosts; ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations’”* (Hg 2:6,7).

God was going “to shake” heaven and earth again in order to sift out of national Israel those who could not be shaken because they had already submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts. This is precisely what the Hebrew writer stated when he

wrote the following a few years before A.D. 70:

*He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things that cannot be shaken [the gospel] may remain.* (Hb 12:26,27).

National Israel would be physically removed in order to allow the “Israel by faith” to shine forth. The catastrophic national event of terminating Israel would allow those who were righteous through their obedience to the gospel to *“shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43). The Hebrew writer continued,

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Hb 12:28).

At the time of the writing of Hebrews 12:28, the kingdom of Jesus was in the process of being established among the Jews throughout the world as Jews came to believe in Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), and then give witness of their faith through obedience to the gospel. The kingdom reign of King Jesus was being received.

### **Verse 30** **Sign Of The Son**

*“And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then will all the tribes of the earth mourn. And they will see the Son of Man coming [present] in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*

We must be sure to note that some translations use the English word “coming” to translate the Greek word *parousia* in this text. In this context this is an unfortunate translation since the coming of Jesus in person is out of context and not under consideration. His coming at the end of time will be personal (See At 1:9-11; 1 Jn 3:2). But the presence of Him having all

authority as King of kings would be revealed through the termination of national Israel, which termination He prophesied.

Jesus had earlier spoken to His disciples on the subject of His coming judgment. He had said that this coming (presence) would be *“in the glory of His Father with His angels [messengers]”* (Mt 16:27). Jesus had said in chapter 16 that some of His immediate disciples would experience this coming (presence). *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”* (Mt 16:28).

So the **sign** here in Matthew 24:30 refers to what Jesus had previously prophesied. When the Roman army eventually came, such would be God’s final **signal** to believe in King Jesus who foretold these things. The fulfillment would be God’s last proof of Jesus as the Messiah.

The word “see” could be translated “perceive” or “discern.” When all these things happened, people would perceive the judgment of Jesus on Jerusalem. **“Coming in the clouds”** is judgment language from the Old Testament (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:3). When Jesus brought down this judgment on national Israel through the Roman army, then people would perceive the judgment power of the Son and His gospel reign as King of kings.

The disciples would witness the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. They would understand that Daniel 7:13,14 was fulfilled. Daniel had prophesied the following:

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. And He came to the Ancient of Days. And they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And His sovereignty will not be destroyed.*

This prophecy speaks of the **ascension of Jesus**, for Jesus ascended unto the Ancient of Days, who is the Father. However, before Jesus ascended to

heaven, all authority in heaven and earth had been given unto Him (See Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 17:2). Many would not realize this until the physical fulfillment of the prophecy that He made in Matthew 24.

When Jesus came in judgment on Jerusalem, then the Jews would realize that Jesus was *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (Ep 1:21; see Ph 2:9-11). Jesus was Lord of lords and King of kings before A.D. 70 (See 1 Tm 6:15). However, true Israel by faith did not *“shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Mt 13:43) until after national Israel was shaken in A.D. 70, and finally gone. When national Israel was taken away, the true Israel (the church), that could not be shaken, shined forth in the kingdom reign of Jesus. This was a marvel, “a sign,” that the disciples would experience in their lifetime.

If reference in Matthew 24:30 is not to the ascension of Jesus to the Father by the coming in the clouds, then the figure is to **coming in judgment**. This is a figure from the Old Testament that signified God’s coming in judgment upon the unrighteous (See Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Ez 30:2). In the historical context, therefore, this is what Jesus is here signifying. He indicated this same thought during His trial when He stated to the high priest in Jerusalem, *“Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Mt 26:64).

The high priest would not literally see Jesus at the right hand of the Father with all authority. However, he would see this power manifested by proxy through the instrumentality of the Roman army. Those unbelieving Jews who experienced the destruction of Jerusalem certainly wondered why God was judging them. On the other hand, the disciples before A.D. 70 recognized the kingdom reign of Jesus. This kingdom reign would be demonstrated in A.D. 70 by the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple encouraged many disheartened Jews to

turn to Jesus. This is the historical commentary on what Paul revealed in Romans 9-11:

*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part [before A.D. 70] has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved [through obedience to the gospel] (Rm 11:25,26).*

Israel would be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, that is, **through obedience to the gospel**. However, because of the stubborn nature of some Jews, these Jews, before they would believe, had to experience an open demonstration by God before they would understand that God was finished with national Israel.

### **Verse 31**

#### **Sending Of The Evangelists**

*“And He will send His messengers with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”*

The Greek word **angelos**, that is translated “angels” in this text, should be translated “messengers.” It is so translated in Matthew 11:10: *“Behold, I send My messenger [“angelos”] before Your face.”* It is also translated such in Luke 7:24: *“When the messengers [“angelos”] of John had departed.”* Also, Jesus *“sent messengers [“angelos”] before His face”* to Jerusalem (Lk 9:52; see 2 Co 12:7; Js 2:25).

It seems that because some translators believed that Matthew 24 somehow refers to the end of time, they translate the word *angelos* to refer to heavenly angels. But the context does not warrant this translation. Jesus is not historically jumping in the text from A.D. 70 to some time over two thousand years later at His final coming.

Before the gospel of His ascension and coronation, Jesus did send His messengers forth into all the



world. He said to His disciples, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”* (Mt 28:19). *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mk 16:15). *“And they went out and preached everywhere”* (Mk 16:20).

The disciples went forth from Jerusalem in Acts 8:4 in order to take the message of the gospel to all the world. Those who would believe were **gathered together into the community of gospel-obedient subjects**. Those who recognized that *“all things were fulfilled”* (Mt 5:18), came to Jesus. In their obedience to the gospel, they turned from Jewish nationalism to spiritual revivalism. They were taught the following:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Gl 3:28,29).

The messengers (evangelists) went forth with the **gospel sound of a trumpet call**. The trumpet call finds its symbolism in the Old Testament. The trumpet was sounded as a warning of impending danger (See Nm 10:2; Is 27:13: Jl 2). The preaching of the gospel was Jesus' call to all men to believe the gospel (See 2 Th 2:14). The disciples went forth not only with the message of the gospel, but also the message of Matthew 24. There was a call to King Jesus in response to His atoning sacrifice. The trumpet call of the gospel delivered obedient Jews from sin, as well as from death that would result from the physical destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70.

### **Verses 32,33**

#### **Parable Of The Fig Tree**

*“Now learn the parable of the fig tree. When its branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”*

When the Jewish nationalist began to prepare for

their resistance against Rome, then Christians could see that tragedy was coming. They could interpret the rise of Jewish nationalism as a sign of the end.

The meaning of the parable from the fig tree is the nearness of the destruction as indicated by Jesus' statements of verses 5-29. The fig tree puts forth her tender branches and leaves in the spring. Such indicates that summer is coming. The occurrence of the events of verses 5-29 would indicate the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem because the "maturity" of nationalism was strong throughout the Roman Empire.

The disciples would understand that the *"coming [presence] of the Lord in judgment in time was at hand"* (Js 5:8). For this reason, Jesus says, *"I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me"* (Rv 3:20). Through His messengers who went into all the Roman Empire, there was continual pleas through the gospel to come out of the resistance of Jewish nationalism that would eventually end in war with Rome.

### **Verse 34**

## **Generational Witness Of Doom**

*"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled."*

Some of those of **this generation**, the generation to whom Jesus was speaking directly, would not die before all that He had just said had occurred. This verse is certainly parallel with what Jesus had said in Matthew 16:27,28. On that occasion Jesus said in the context of the Son of Man coming in the glory of His Father, *"There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."* They would witness the coronation of Jesus at His ascension. They would also witness His kingdom authority that was demonstrated in His judgment on national Israel.

When they went forth after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples went from city to city in Israel, preaching the gospel of the kingdom reign of King Jesus. This was their message of hope to be delivered from the intimidation of the Jewish nationalists who were campaigning throughout the Empire in order to recruit followers. While first preaching the gospel of Jesus' atoning death, and His kingdom reign, the messengers continually had a message of doom for national Israel that was relayed on to all Jewish disciples.

In their preaching, the unbelieving Jews would persecute the early messengers from city to city because the message of the messengers meant the end of Israel. If Jesus was the only Lord and Messiah, then there was no messiah in the future to deliver national Israel from Rome. Jesus said to the disciples,

*But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes* (Mt 10:23).

Because of the Jews' persecution of the messengers of Jesus, God would bring judgment upon national Israel. Before Jesus arrived at this context of His message to the disciples in Matthew 24, He had stated, *"Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (Mt 23:36). "These things" referred to all things that led up to the final consummation of Israel. These things would come upon the generation to whom He addressed this message of warning.

God would bring the punishment of judgment upon the generation to whom Jesus personally ministered because **they had personally rejected Him as the Messiah**. Jesus had said to the rejecting Jews,

*The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to*

*hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here* (Mt 12:41,42).

Jesus' generation of Jews would receive a more harsh judgment because they had personally experienced the presence of the incarnate Son of God. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, was not only God's intended time to openly demonstrate His work through Israel, it was also His judgment upon a generation that personally rejected His Son.

### **Verse 35**

## **The Enduring Word**

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”*

Jesus seems to comfort the disciples at this point in this most terrifying picture of the end. No matter what the national calamity might be, they must trust in the word of God that endures forever. Peter possibly reflected on the thought of this statement of Jesus when he wrote the following just a few years before Jerusalem's destruction: *“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever”* (1 Pt 1:24,25).

It is doubtful that Peter fully understood this when Jesus first made the pronouncements of Matthew 24 in his presence. Nevertheless, he, as well as the other disciples at hand, would soon realize that they could not put their faith in any nation, even though it had been ordained by God some 1,400 years before.

The only thing that would permeate the destruction of all things would be the word of God. Eventually, the present heaven and earth would pass away (See 2 Pt 3:10,11). But the word of the Lord endures forever. Therefore, Jesus assumed that they would wholeheartedly trust in His promises regardless of all the calamity that was coming upon those who sought to establish an independent Jewish nation within Palestine.

## **Verse 36**

### **Time For Destruction**

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but My Father only.”*

“**That day**” is here a generic term as “**the Sabbath**” is in verse 20. In other words, this is the time of destruction. The indication is not in reference to a specific 24-hour day, but to **the time** when the destruction would occur. While on earth, and in His incarnate state, Jesus chose not to know this time. Neither did the angels know.

At the time Jesus was making these pronouncements to the disciples, it was not necessary that neither He nor angels be aware of the actual time of the destruction. If He had known the exact year, then we assume that His disciples would have pressed Him for a date. But He knew that when people have a specific date for finalities, they wait until the day before in order to get themselves right with God. For this reason, Jesus made the statement that only the Father knew when these things would transpire about which He spoke. He would later say why He made the statement. Those who believe must be ready at all times.

We must also keep in mind that if Jesus gave a specific date, then He would have nullified the power of the disciples’ prayers that they were to utter so that the coming calamity would not happen in the winter or on a Sabbath. If a specific date was given by Jesus, then any prayer to change the date would have been futile. Or, Jesus would have been a false prophet in reference to the established date if the Father chose to answer the disciples’ prayers, and thus change the date that Jesus had given during His earthly ministry.

Luke’s account of Jesus’ statement helps us to understand better the flow of the text in order to understand “that day” to refer to the context of the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke recorded,

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no*

*means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and **that day** come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore** (Lk 21:33-36).*

Those Jews who were consumed in the affairs of the world would certainly not believe in Jesus or His prophecy, let alone expect the coming judgment upon Jerusalem when many would lose all that they had. In fact, Peter stated that they would be mocking this belief of Christians.

***Scoffers will come in the last days**, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Pt 3:3,4).*

Of course these scoffers had forgotten the flood of Noah's day. They had forgotten Sodom and Gomorrah. Regardless of their forgetfulness, however, God would bring this judgment upon national Israel. About five years before A.D. 70, the Holy Spirit inspired an entire book to be written that would remind the rich Sadducean Jews that their riches were corrupted (Read the book of James).

The key word here is **watch**. Mark records more information that Jesus gave at this point in the discourse.

*Take heed, **watch** and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going on a journey, who left his house and gave authority to his bondservants and to each one his work. And he commanded the door keeper to **watch**. Therefore, you **watch, for you do not know when the master of the house comes**, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cock crow, or in the morning—**lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping**. And what I say to you I say to all: **Watch!** (Mk 13:33-37).*

## **Verses 37-39**

### **Taking Of The Wicked**

*"But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man. For as in the days that were*

*before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until that day when Noah entered the ark. And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming [presence] of the Son of Man."*

The "coming" that Jesus is talking about—the termination of national Israel—will be **as the days of Noah**. Both the flood of Noah's day and the destruction of Jerusalem were "comings" of the Lord in judgment **in time**. However, the final coming of Jesus in judgment at the end of time will be different.

The flood and destruction of Jerusalem may be typical of the final coming. However, we must understand that nothing has ever happened in the history of humanity that will fully illustrate what will happen at the end of time. Therefore, all illustrations of the "end-of-time" judgment by "in-time" judgments must be metaphorical.

**The New Testament writers took that which was literal, and had actually happened in history, to illustrate that which will happen at the end of time.** We must keep in mind, therefore, that these historical events in time that are metaphorically used to illustrate final judgment do not fully explain what will happen when Jesus comes again.

Jerusalem's destruction would be as it was in the days of Noah (See Gn 7:6-23). God sent the flood because of the wickedness of man. *"Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gn 6:5). Such wickedness would be characteristic of the unbelieving Jews who crucified the Son of God. They were hardened to the message of the gospel of King Jesus, though they personally experienced the miraculous confirmation of God directly from heaven (See Jn 3:2). People were more concerned about the material advantages of life than spiritual matters. The Pharisees consumed on their own lusts the financial help the children were to give to their parents (Mk 7:9-13). They loved money (See Lk 16:14). The rich Sadducean Jews had *"lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury"* (See Js 5:1-6). They had cheated in the

wages that were due to their laborers (See Js 5:4). As it was in the days of Noah, so it was in the days of Israel before A.D. 70.

In verses 37-40 Jesus is saying that people will be living in their own normal wicked and materialistic manner prior unto “that day” of destruction. **It was this way in the days of Noah. It would be the same before the destruction of national Israel.** And, it will be the same at the end of time. Those who reject the message of the gospel see only those things of this world. They refuse to submit to the “coming of the Lord” in judgment.

### **Verses 40,41** **Wicked Taken – Righteous Left**

*“Then will two men be in the field, the one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.”*

Here is another similarity between the times of Noah and the destruction of Jerusalem. When the flood came, righteous Noah and his family entered the ark. They were saved from the flood. However, the flood then came **and took away the wicked. Only the righteous were left safely in the ark.** So it would be in the destruction of Jerusalem. **The wicked would be taken and the righteous would be left.** Those who use this arrangement to refer to the final coming seek to reverse this order.

This is not, therefore, a context for “rapture theology” that is so prevalent among theologians today. Jesus said, *“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.”* Those who propagate rapture theology **reverse** the illustration of Jesus in reference to the flood of Noah’s day. In their attempt to force this passage to have some reference to the end of time, they have reversed the order of the illustration of Noah’s day (See 2 Pt 3:15,16).

We must keep in mind that Jesus’ use of the flood of Noah’s day to illustrate the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are to show that in the destruction *“the*



*righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (Mt 13:43). **The wicked unbelieving Jews would be taken.** The righteous would be left.

At the end of time when Jesus comes, **He will take the righteous from the earth on to heaven** (See 1 Th 4:17). In the context of Matthew 24, however, it is the wicked who are taken. For this reason, we must affirm that Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 and not the final coming of Jesus.

## **Verse 42 Watch!**

*“Therefore, watch, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming.”*

The term **“hour”** is here used with a generic meaning. It is not a specific 60-minute hour, as **“the day”** of verse 36 was not a specific 24-hour solar day. Reference is to **a time** when all the events of Jesus’ discourse would take place. Emphasis is on the fact that there would be a specific time in history when all this would happen, though the time would occur over a period of weeks and months.

The point is that those who believed in what Jesus was saying had to continually watch in order to avoid becoming caught up in the affairs of the world. These were not things for which one could prepare. They were things for which those who were living the gospel must be concerned lest they be caught up in the hysteria of the pleas of the nationalistic Jews.

The emphasis of Jesus on the encouragement to “watch” might be good advice for some today who seek to excite people into looking for the “signs of the times” in order to prepare for the final coming of the Lord. Since Jesus’ exhortation was to always be prepared, then the coming in judgment on national Israel would not be a surprise on the part of the disciples, **but an expectation.** Since He gave the warnings, then those who believed in Him would

expect that all His prophesied events would come to pass.

The saints did not need to know an exact hour when the carcass would be consumed. They just needed to know that it would happen when the vultures showed up in Palestine. Jesus gave them all the dots to connect. Once they started to connect all the prophetic dots in the few years before A.D. 70, then they knew that the time had come.

### **Verses 43,44**

#### **The Unexpected Presence**

*“But know this, that if the head of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, **you also be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”*

In this context Jesus gave “generic signs” from which they should deduct the end of national Israel and the fall of Jerusalem. No specific details were given. No names were stated. No calendars were distributed to the disciples. He gave just enough information to generate “watching” on the part of those who believed what He said. Those who believed would need no more information.

After the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, the apostles evidently stayed in Jerusalem for as long as ten years, at least until Acts 15. The reason for this was obvious. Jerusalem was where devoted and nationalistic Jews came to offer sacrifices at the altar during the Passover / Pentecost feast. It was the prime opportunity to call through the gospel the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In A.D. 58 or 59 Paul made his last trip to Jerusalem in order to make his final plea to Jews who might obey the gospel (See At 21). However, their vehement rejection of the gospel and attempted murder of Paul were evidence that at this time (A.D. 58,59) the radical nationalistic Jews were ready for the judgment of God in A.D. 70. What Jesus had pronounced in Matthew 23:34-36 was

ready to happen. The “**righteous blood**” of all the innocent prophets of God was about to be brought down on this generation of defiant Jews.

It was a time when the beloved Israel was coming to a close because the Jews failed to understand that the nation of Israel was only God’s means to an end, but not the end in itself. So Jesus mourned over the nation that had preserved a segment of world society until the Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of the Messiah. It was a time when Jesus was sorrowful for God’s people.

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not. Behold, your house [temple] is left to you desolate (Mt 23:37,38).*

In Jesus’ pronouncements of Matthew 24 He wanted to give the faithful adequate indications of when to stay away from Jerusalem and Judea. Jewish Christians must not become trapped in the “traditions of the fathers,” nor in the materialistic vanities of Jewish economics. It would be best that they sell “*their possessions and goods*” and divide them among all believers according to the needs of the people (At 2:45; see At 4:32-37). Residents of Jerusalem were going to lose their possessions anyway in the coming destruction. Why keep that which they would eventually lose? In some way, therefore, the resident Jewish Christians sensed that eventually they were going to lose all investments in national Israel. If not one stone would be left upon another in Jerusalem, then forty years before the event, it was best to sell it all and move on. “*And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need*” (At 2:45). “*Many as were owners of land or houses sold them*” (At 4:34).

### **Verses 45-47**

## **Faithful And Wise Servants**

*“Who then is a faithful and wise bondservant whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that bondservant whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods.”*

The faithful and wise servant understood the irresponsibility of his relationship to the master’s household. So it is with those disciples who remained faithful, and thus, wisely understood their duties to serve the Lord. They were not diverted to the cares of this world, nor drawn away by the politics of the nationalistic Israelites. Their citizenship in heaven was stronger than their connection to the physical “seed of Abraham.” Therefore, they took heed and watched for the coming judgment of the master of the household. They were always prepared for His coming in order that they not be caught unprepared.

### **Verses 48-51**

#### **The Evil Servant**

*“But if that evil bondservant will say in his heart, ‘My master delays,’ and begins to beat his fellow bondservants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that bondservant will come in a day when he is not looking for him and in an hour that he does not know. And he will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

The **evil servant** will not be spiritually awakened by the imminent coming of the Lord in his lifetime. He puts this thought out of his mind and carries on with the ordinary things of life. In Jesus’ personal conversation here with His disciples, He was emphasizing the fact that this **coming** of the Lord would happen “in this generation.” He had said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation”* (Mt 23:36). *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”* (Mt 16:28).

Jesus **was not** leading them to believe that the

**final coming and end of the world** would be in their lifetime. The final coming of Jesus was not something about which they thought at the time.

The New Testament **does not** teach the imminent final return of Jesus. That is, the Holy Spirit did not inspire New Testament writers to write that the final coming of Jesus would happen in the lifetime of the first century disciples. However, **Jesus and the inspired writers did teach and write about the imminent coming of Jesus in time in judgment upon Jerusalem.** It was this return for which Christians in those times were to be looking. This was the return about which James wrote, *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand”* (Js 5:7,8). Therefore, Jesus urged His immediate disciples to look for this coming. Those who did not heed the warnings of Matthew 24 would inevitably be deceived by the theology of the nationalistic recruiters, and consequently suffer in the **weeping and gnashing of teeth** of the destruction of their prized city Jerusalem, the temple and nation.



### ABREVIATIONS OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Ci**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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