

The AD 70 Prophecy from Jesus in Matthew 24

Part I

Matthew 24:1-23

In this two-part study, we will examine Matthew 24 verse by verse. I must give credit to Sam Storms, my long-time friend from Bridgeway in OKC. His three-part outline for Matthew 24 is the best I've seen, and what I write here comes from the wonderful research of Dr. Storms. We'll cover verses 1-31 in part one.

The Context of Matthew 24 (Chapter 23 and 24:1-3)

Jesus has repeatedly predicted that a time is coming when God will punish national Israel for her sin and rebellious rejection of the Messiah - Mt. 21:33-36 (esp. v. 43); Mt. 22:1-14 (esp. v. 7); Mt. 23:29-36 (esp. vv. 35-36); Mt. 23:37-39 (esp. v. 38). Fulfillment would be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

These predictions, especially the one in Mt. 23:38 pertaining to the Temple, provoke a response of concerned inquiry by the disciples (Mt. 24:1). Jesus shocks the disciples yet again by confirming His prediction of the destruction of the Temple in even more explicit terms (Mt. 24:2). Micah (3:12) and Jeremiah (7:12-14) had dared to make similar predictions of Solomon's temple in the 6th century B.C. (fulfilled 586 B.C.). But by Jesus' day, the Jews held the belief that God's Temple was indestructible. Shocked by what Jesus has been saying, they ask Him three questions in Matthew 24:3:

"When will this happen, and **what** will be the sign of Your coming **and** of the end of the age?"

The disciples were asking about the time when Jesus would "come" in judgment to destroy the Temple and bring the Jewish "age" to an end. N. T. Wright says, "within the mainline Jewish writings of this period, covering a wide range of styles, genres, political persuasions and theological perspectives, there is virtually no evidence the Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe. . . . What, then, did they believe was going to happen? They believed that the present world order would come to an end – the world order in which pagans held power, and Jews, the covenant people of the Creator, did not."
(Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 333)

The question the disciples ask is about Jesus' 'coming' or 'arriving' in the sense of enthronement as King. When will You come in Your Kingdom? When will this age, symbolized by the Temple religion, be over?

The Content of Matthew 24 (verses 4-14)

These verses are designed to prevent premature excitement and speculation about when the events of v. 3 would occur. *"Don't jump to any hasty conclusions,"* says Jesus. The main point is that these are not the signs of the *impending destruction of Jerusalem*. These events are the beginning of birth pains. They are the events which will characterize the time from A.D. 30-70 – what the Bible calls *"The last days."*

1. Religious impostors and Messianic pretenders (v. 5)

See Acts 5:36-37; 8:9-10; 13:6; 21:38. Josephus reports that during the reign of Nero deceivers and false prophets were arrested daily. Eusebius refers to the prevalence of false messiahs in this period.

2. Increased military conflict (v. 6)

The *Annals of Tacitus*, which describes events from AD 14-68 describes the turmoil of this period with phrases such as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "commotions in Thrace," insur-

rections in Gaul," intrigues among the Parthians," the war in Britain," and "the war in Armenia."

3. Political upheaval and natural disasters (vs. 7-8)

N.T. Wright documents in Chapter 6 of *The New Testament and the People of God* how the entire known world during A.D. 30-70 was in political upheaval. Acts 11:28 describes a famine in A.D. 44 and Acts 16:26 documents a great earthquake. Historic records show dozens of earthquakes. Verse 8 says all these "sorrows" do not mean Jerusalem's destruction is imminent. It's just the beginning.

4. Persecution and martyrdom (vs. 9-10)

Listen to the synoptic gospel of Mark: "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts and you will be flogged in the synagogues" (13:9). The "courts/councils/synagogues" indicates that Jesus has in mind a first century fulfillment. After A.D. 70, the Jewish religious political system ceased to exist. We see fulfillment in Acts 4:1-18; 5:17-49; Acts 8:1 and in other places.

5. False Prophets (v. 11)

The New Testament books (all written before A.D. 70) describe a large number of false prophets (see Acts 20:29-30; Romans 16:17-18; II Corinthians 11:13; Galatians 2:4; II Peter 4:1; and I John 4:1).

6. Religious insurrection and indifference (vs. 12-13)

Verse 6 leads to a transition. Perseverance is the proof of God's grace and the gift of eternal life. The "end" means either the end of the tribulation (described in vs. 4-14) or "to the end of one's life."

7. Worldwide preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ (v. 14)

"Whole world" translates *oikoumene*, which literally means, an inhabited area. The Roman Empire used this word to speak of the "known world" (see Luke 2:1; Acts 24:5; Col. 1:5-6; 1:23; Rom. 1:8).

The Content of Matthew 24 (vs. 15-28)

Whereas the events of 4-14 are characteristic of the "beginning of birth pains," **v. 15** provides THE sign that confirms the consummation of God's judgment against Israel (the abomination of desolation). The Abomination of Desolation is referred to 4 times in Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Jesus said refers to "those who read Daniel, let them understand" (v. 15) that the Abomination of Desolation is coming.

Matthew was writing to a JEWISH audience (who reads Daniel). Mark clearly identifies the Roman army as the fulfillment of the Abomination of Desolation. Josephus tells us that Titus, the Roman general, broke through the walls of Jerusalem, and presented the Eagle Standard of Rome into the Temple and offered sacrifices to "Caesar as Lord" and declared Titus victorious over Jerusalem (they destroyed it).

8. Jesus describes the plan of escape (vs. 16-20)

N.T. Wright says, "the disciples were not to stay and fight for the physical survival of Jerusalem. They are not to be implicated in the coming war. Jesus will die at the hands of the Romans on the charge of being a Jewish rebel, but they are not to do so. No mistaken sense of loyalty must sway them."

William Whitson (1737), the best English translator of Josephus, writes, "Jewish Christians in the city recalled to mind Jesus prediction and caution "to flee." Not one Christian died in the destruction."

9. The great tribulation (vs. 21-22)

The war that broke out in A.D. 66 between Rome and the Jewish people was simply an intensified continuation of hostilities. It was brutal. Starving, a mother ate her son (Josephus Books 5 and 6). Apocalyptic language can be hyperbolic (Ex. 11:6; 9:18; 10:14; Joel 1:1-4; 2:2; Ezek. 5:9; Dan. 9:12).

10. The coming of Christ in Judgment on Israel (vs. 23-28)

False Messiahs would try to draw Jews to them. "Don't follow them," says Jesus. The coming of Christ in judgment on Jerusalem (by the Roman Army) would bring "an end" to the Old Covenant.