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Toward an Understanding of Matthew 24

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Introduction

The differences in the religious world on the subject of eschatology are remarkably diverse—whether a-millennial, post-millennial or pre-millennial. These differences do not relegate themselves to a few isolated texts in the Bible, but touch scripture at every turn from the Old through the New Testaments. Due to the broad divergence of views, it is incumbent upon every Christian to have a firm footing on the study of last things in the Bible.

The task before us is an examination of Matthew chapter twenty-four. This study or research has limitations, which include a lack of a thorough word studies, a complete settling of all passages which need reconciliation with Matthew chapter twenty-four (e.g. Luke 17:20-37) and a complete comparison and contrasting of the a-millennial and pre-millennial views. Hence, the short paper is appropriately entitled, *Toward An Understanding of Matthew 24*. Dialogue is welcome with good spirited students that the author of this short work awaits with joy.

Contextual Setting of the Text

The judgment pronouncements and pictures of Matthew chapter twenty-four are couched in the greater context of the narrative of Matthew. William Hendriksen writes:

In general it can be said that the purpose of this Gospel was full to win the Jews for Christ; that is, to gain those still unconverted and to strengthen those already converted. The Hebraistic character of Matthew's Gospel..points to this as its goal. In order to achieve it the emphasis throughout is placed on the fact that Jesus is indeed the long awaited Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures. In Matthew particular stress is placed on the fact that Jesus is indeed the Christ of prophecy.¹

¹ William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1975), 97, 98.

Jesus presented Himself to the Jewish nation as the rightful Messiah. Matthew's narrative of Jesus' genealogy sets Him forth as the regal heir to the throne of David to whom God had sworn an oath that He would bring from his body a "seed" or descendant to reign over the eternal kingdom.² Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy was presented to the Jewish nation as proof of the truthfulness of His claim to be the Messiah (e.g. virgin birth,³ place of His birth,⁴ the appearance of the star,⁵ being preceded by a forerunner,⁶ His centralized work from Capernaum,⁷ His healing ministry,⁸ withdrawal of ministry to remote places before His time,⁹ the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on the donkey,¹⁰ His rejection by the nation,¹¹ the abandonment of the disciples at the time of Jesus' trial,¹² the death of substitution,¹³ and His crucifixion between two thieves¹⁴). Jesus powers over disease,¹⁵ dead,¹⁶ nature¹⁷ and demons¹⁸ demonstrated that He was the Son of God fulfilling prophecies by His mighty acts.¹⁹ The truthfulness of Jesus' identity, His death, burial and resurrection was to be the electing power to call the true Israel of God out of the Jewish nation.²⁰ The straight gate led to eternal life, but few would find it.²¹ Yet, before Jesus and His Apostles' work was completed, all the true Israel of God would be

² Matthew 1:1-17; cp. 2 Samuel 7:12-17

³ Matthew 1:18-25; cp. Isaiah 7:14

⁴ Matthew 2:1a; cp. Micah 5:1-4

⁵ Matthew 2:7; cp. Numbers 24:17

⁶ Matthew 3:1-3; cp. Isaiah 40:3

⁷ Matthew 4:12, 14; cp. Isaiah 9:1, 2

⁸ Matthew 8:14-17; cp. Isaiah 53:4

⁹ Matthew 12:15-21; cp. Isaiah 42:1-4

¹⁰ Matthew 21:1-5; cp. Zechariah 9:9

¹¹ Matthew 21:33-42; cp. Psalm 118:22, 23

¹² Matthew 26:31; cp. Zechariah 13:7

¹³ Matthew 26:67; cp. Isaiah 53:3

¹⁴ Matthew 27:38; cp. Isaiah 53:9, 12

¹⁵ Matthew 8:1-4, 5-13, 14, 15; 9:1-8, 27-31

¹⁶ Matthew 9:18-26

¹⁷ Matthew 14:22-33;

¹⁸ Matthew 15:21-28

¹⁹ Isaiah 61:1ff

²⁰ Romans 9:6

²¹ Matthew 7:13; Romans 11:5

called by the electing power of the gospel.²² This true Israel of God would be those who were from the Jewish and Gentile nations who came to believe Jesus to be the Son of God, identified with Him in baptism and lived under His Lordship.²³

Yet, this overwhelming body of evidences was presented to the Jewish nation and the message even began to spill over the boards of the Jewish race to other races during Jesus' earthly ministry.²⁴ After healing the centurion's servant and amazed at this Gentile's faith and insight, Jesus said:

Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, no even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."²⁵

The exclusion of ethnic Jews (sons of the kingdom), or those who everyone would have believed due to their ancestry would have been in the kingdom and the inclusion of people (like the centurion) from other races was a shock to Jewish ears. The Jewish leaders viewed their ability to trace their physical lineage back to Abraham to be sufficient grounds to expect right standing with God and acceptance in the Messiah's kingdom. Yet, the Baptist had made it clear that God could "*raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*"²⁶ The dye had long since been cast in God's eternal purpose²⁷ and expressed in Old Testament prophecy that God's future people would not only be composed of physical descendants of Abraham but from the nations—all who

²² Romans 11:25, 26; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

²³ Romans 6:3-6

²⁴ Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28

²⁵ Matthew 8:10-12

²⁶ Matthew 3:9

²⁷ Ephesians 3:1-7

believed in His Son.²⁸ Further, physical connection with Abraham had never been the criteria required of God for acceptance in the Kingdom of the Messiah or the Ishmaelites, Edomites and all the sons of Keturah would have had right to claim Messiah's "*blessing*" based on physical lineage.²⁹ This truth was sorely misunderstood by the Jewish leaders,³⁰ as well as Jesus' own disciples prior to the day of Pentecost³¹ when the Holy Spirit would provide the supernatural instruction necessary for them to perceive the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom.³²

Only a certain kind of heart would receive the truth of Jesus' deity and identity as the Messiah. Jesus in the Beatitudes painted the spiritual profile of true members of the kingdom of God.³³ Jesus explained this concept in the parable of the separation of the wheat and tares to His disciples. Regarding the *wheat* (those who would be saved) He said, "*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*"³⁴ In the words of John the Baptist, the separation between those who would receive the Holy Spirit or not would not be over ethnic Jewish ancestral lines, but to those who would bear the fruit sought by God.³⁵ John said, "*And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*"³⁶ His separation metaphor was of a threshing floor where wheat is separated from chaff with the wheat gathered into the barn and the chaff

²⁸ Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Isaiah 2:1ff; 56:3ff; Amos 9:11-15; Isaiah. 11:6-10

²⁹ Genesis.21:10; Galatians.4:21-31; Romans 9:6-13; Galatians 3:26-29

³⁰ John 8:33 – 59

³¹ Acts 1:6

³² John 14:25, 26; 16:12, 13; Acts 2:1-4

³³ Matthew 5:3-12

³⁴ Matthew 13:43

³⁵ Matthew 3:7-9

³⁶ Matthew 3:10

piled and burned.³⁷ What a sobering foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish economy, which would be expanded on in Matthew chapter twenty-four.

Why would belief in the true Messiah be so difficult for most of the Jewish nation? Even the forerunner of the Messiah cried, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*”³⁸ The nature of the message was shockingly unexpected for it involved life change for all with no credit given to ancestry,³⁹ realization of one’s spiritual bankruptcy (which did not square at all with the general Jew’s concept of righteousness)⁴⁰ and totally trusting the grace of God for one’s salvation.⁴¹ Jesus’ exposure of their vengeful hearts toward their fellowmen,⁴² their hearts filled with adulterous thinking,⁴³ their wholesale divorce for any and every reason,⁴⁴ their track record of lying for personal gain through carefully crafted loop-holes,⁴⁵ and their spirit of retaliation against those who had wronged them⁴⁶ would create repentance in the hearts of the sincere, but casual dismissal to murderous intents in the minds of the hardhearted. Jesus unveiled the hypocrisy of Jewish people (leaders) showing that there were those who gave alms, prayed and gave the appearance of fasting all to be seen of men.⁴⁷ Surrender and total commitment to the Lordship of Jesus was the demand⁴⁸ and that was what those who were not the spiritual sheep of Jesus were perfectly unwilling to do.⁴⁹

³⁷ Matthew 3:12

³⁸ Matthew 3:2

³⁹ Matthew 3:9

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:3; Romans 10:1-3

⁴¹ Matthew 5:6; cp. Matthew 20:1-16

⁴² Matthew 5:21f

⁴³ Matthew 5:27f

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:1-9

⁴⁵ Matthew 5:33f

⁴⁶ Matthew 5:38f

⁴⁷ Matthew 6:1-18

⁴⁸ Matthew 8:18-22

⁴⁹ Matthew 7:21-27

The remnant the truth of the Messiah drew was a surprising conglomerate that only served to draw Him greater criticism.⁵⁰ Included in Matthew's record, we have a group of simple Galilean fishermen,⁵¹ a Roman centurion,⁵² former demon possessed men,⁵³ a Jewish tax-collector (and other potential disciples from among the "*tax-collectors and sinners*"),⁵⁴ a synagogue ruler and a woman with an twelve-year ceremonial uncleanness,⁵⁵ an unknown number of true disciples from the "*great multitudes (who) followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan*"⁵⁶ and a thief on His right hand at His crucifixion.⁵⁷

Was the truth so difficult to see? Blind men saw it.⁵⁸ Jesus said if Tyre and Sidon had been permitted to see all the evidences He gave they would have "*repented long ago.*"⁵⁹ Had ancient Sodom the opportunities of the Capernaum of Jesus' day, He said, "*they would have remained until this day.*"⁶⁰

Thus, the program of the Messiah and His body of truth was plain. "*Every plant which My Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.*"⁶¹

As Jesus made His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem one week before His resurrection on the eve on the Passover to be celebrated on Thursday (14th day of the 1st month), the multitudes hailed Him saying, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He*

⁵⁰ Matthew 9:9-13

⁵¹ Matthew 4:18-22

⁵² Matthew 8:5-13

⁵³ Matthew 8:28-34

⁵⁴ Matthew 9:9-13

⁵⁵ Matthew 9:18-26

⁵⁶ Matthew 4:25

⁵⁷ Luke 23:39-43

⁵⁸ Matthew 9:27-31

⁵⁹ Matthew 11:20, 21

⁶⁰ Matthew 11:23

⁶¹ Matthew 15:13

who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”⁶² The King was presenting Himself to the Jewish nation, but upon investigation He found that they had changed His Father’s house into a den of thieves with the graft and corruption.⁶³ As He neared the city on Monday, there was a fig tree at a distance on which He found no fruit. He said, *“Let no fruit grow on you ever again.”*⁶⁴ Here we have a somber forecast of the Jewish nation, which was on the eve of being cursed for their lack of spiritual fruit. In all of Jesus’ dealings with the Jewish leaders, chief priest, elders, Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees on that controversial Tuesday before His death, He found them driven by self-interests and not truth⁶⁵ and failing to believe in the Scriptures and the power of God.⁶⁶

In Jesus’ parable of the landowner whose son was murdered by evil vinedressers, one can vividly see the specter of the Jewish nation who would crucify the Messiah and in their judgment of those vinedressers judge themselves saying, *“He will destroy those wicked men, miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”*⁶⁷ In Jesus’ parable of the marriage feast, spurned and violent rejections of invitations of a king are repaid with the execution of the murders and the burning of their city.⁶⁸ Then, invitations are extended to people in the *highways*.⁶⁹ In short, when the Jewish nation was destroyed for their rejection of the Lord’s invitation, then the message would be preached to the Gentile nations, but the requirement of a

⁶² Matthew 21:9

⁶³ Matthew 21:12, 13

⁶⁴ Matthew 21:19

⁶⁵ Matthew 21:23-27; 22:15-22

⁶⁶ Matthew 22:23-33

⁶⁷ Matthew 21:41

⁶⁸ Matthew 22:7

⁶⁹ Matthew 22:9

wedding garment (presumably, righteousness which comes through grace) was required of all.⁷⁰

Jesus' pronounces eight woes on the scribes and Pharisees, who are characterized by Jesus as binding heavy loads on the people which cannot be born, who loved the position and prestige, have a pretense of religion but cheat widows, who evangelize only to lead disciples into heresy, who created loop-holes for lying, who major in minors and minored in majors and who were dirty of character.⁷¹ Jesus bemoaned the fate of Jerusalem who had often been invited under His divine protection, but refused.⁷² Jesus concludes, "*See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'*"⁷³

Against this previously described backdrop, we read:

*Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*⁷⁴

Time-Text

J. Marcellus Kik approaches the study of Matthew chapter twenty-four in chapter entitled, *The Time-Text*.⁷⁵ This approach seems especially logical in light of the various views this text has spun from diverse eschatological foundations adopted by pre-millennial, a-millennial and post-millennial views.

⁷⁰ Matthew 22:10-14

⁷¹ Matthew 23:1-36

⁷² Matthew 23:35

⁷³ Matthew 23:38, 39

⁷⁴ Matthew 24:1, 2

⁷⁵ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 9.

In Matthew 24:34, Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”* This promise of Jesus clearly divides the first thirty-four verses of Matthew 24 into things, which would be fulfilled locally in Jerusalem before that generation, living at the time of Jesus’ promise, passed away. Matthew 24 verses thirty-six through Matthew 25 forty-six concern the Second Coming of Christ and the end of time.

G. C. Brewer notes the pre-millennial slant on the phrase, *“this generation.”* He writes, *“Some men explain this by saying that the word ‘generation’ here means ‘race,’ and that the Jewish people shall not become extinct until all that Jesus had foretold has come to pass.”*⁷⁶

Let us address this view by examining the use of that phrase in some places in both the Old and New Testaments.

*“And the LORD said unto Noah, ‘Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.’”*⁷⁷ *“This generation,”* without doubt, refers to the generation who lived contemporary with Noah and who were not permitted to enter the ark. God said to Moses after the Israelites were on the brink of their forty years wilderness wandering, *“Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers.”*⁷⁸ *“This generation”* has reference to those people living contemporary with Moses and who were not permitted to enter the promised land of Canaan. The Psalmist prayed, *“Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength*

⁷⁶ G. C. Brewer, “Questions and Quibbles (No.5),” *Gospel Advocate* 28 October, 1948, 1034.

⁷⁷ Genesis 7:1

⁷⁸ Genesis 1:35

unto **this generation**, and thy power to every one that is to come.”⁷⁹ Obviously, the only generation, which the Psalmist could show God’s strength to, was the generation in which he lived. Speaking of the generation that tested Him for forty years in the wilderness, God said, “*Forty years long was I grieved with **this generation**, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways.*”⁸⁰

In the New Testament, the term, “generation,” comes from the Greek word, γενεά GENEÁ, which carries the meaning of:

1)fathered, birth, nativity 2) that which has been begotten, men of the same stock, a family 2a) the several ranks of natural descent, the successive members of a genealogy 2b) metaph. a race of men very like each other in endowments, pursuits, character 2b1) esp. in a bad sense, a perverse race 3) the whole multitude of men living at the same time 4) an age (i.e. the time ordinarily occupied by each successive generation), a space of 30 - 33 years.⁸¹

Let us note various occurrences of GENEÁ in the New Testament.

1. At the conclusion of Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, he records, “*So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until Christ are fourteen generations.*”⁸² “Hence, the sense of the word is that of the average life-time of man which may be anywhere from thirty to a hundred years.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Psalm 71:18

⁸⁰ Psalm 95:10

⁸¹ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance (Bible Works, 5.0)

⁸² Matthew 1:17.

⁸³ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 10.

2. Jesus said, “*But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows.*”⁸⁴ The people Jesus referred to was the generation in which both He and John the Baptist lived presenting all the evidences of His divinity.
3. Jesus said, “*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*”⁸⁵ The generation Jesus referred was the generation Jesus preached to and delivered His body of evidences to.
4. Jesus said, “*The queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*”⁸⁶ The queen of the South demonstrated great interest in the wisdom of Solomon, but the people of Jesus’ generation ignored Him.
5. Hence, when Jesus says, “*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfill.*”⁸⁷ It would be totally inconsistent with the other uses of this same phrase to suddenly conclude that it was speaking of people thousands of years into the future. The meaning is *the whole generation living at the same time.*

What conclusion, then, do we draw from Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:34?

What great event, then, would occur to the present generation which caused Christ to use such vivid language in describing it? It was the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70, and the excision of the Jewish Nation from

⁸⁴ Matthew 11:16

⁸⁵ Matthew 12:41

⁸⁶ Matthew 12:42

⁸⁷ Matthew 24:34

the Kingdom. All the verses of Matthew Twenty-four up to verse 34 describe the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D., and the excision of the Jewish Nation from the Kingdom.⁸⁸

If this line of reasoning is correct, it means that all of the efforts of those of the pre-millennial view who seek to force their views of eschatology into this context are incorrect. Therefore, Matthew 24:1-34 cannot be used to justify their contention that all of those events are still to be fulfilled in the future.

The Transition of the Text

Since it has been established that Matthew 24:34 is clear indication that the first thirty four verses of that chapter discuss matters, according to Jesus, which were to take place in the time He described as “*this generation,*” or during the time “the whole multitude of men living at the same time” Jesus was speaking, then we must ask what does the text speak about after that verse?

Note the difference in the transitional statement of this text. Jesus said, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*”⁸⁹ Here are some indications that verse thirty-six moves to a different topic entirely.

Jesus’ discussion moves from the definite to the indefinite. In verses four through thirty-four, Jesus answers the first question of His disciples when they asked, “*When will all these things be?*”⁹⁰ In Jesus’ answer, He is very specific and definite pointing out a specific chain of events which will lead to the end of the Jewish nation. The unfolding, observable events between 30 A.D. and 70 A.D. would include: the coming of false

⁸⁸ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 13, 14.

⁸⁹ Matthew 24:36

⁹⁰ Matthew 24:3

Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earth quakes, persecution of the messengers of Christianity, false prophets, global proclamation of the gospel, the abomination of desolation.⁹¹ All of these matters were quite specific and discernible.

But, from verse 36 forward, the whole flavor of the definite changes to the indefinite and unknown when Jesus says, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”*⁹² The time Jesus speaks of from verse 36 forward as *“that day”* (not *“this generation”*) is unknown to the angels of heaven and even unknown to the Son of God during His earthly existence. Does that sound like the previous section of verses (4-34) when Jesus is definite and specific about things which would happen leading up to a consummation? Jesus compared this indefinite and unknown time to the days of Noah where people were going about their daily routines of life when the flood came upon them unexpectedly. The theme is on readiness for the Lord’s Second Coming in the words, *“And did not know (people of Noah’s day) until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*⁹³

Note the phrases where the readers are admonished to be ready since the time of the Second Coming of the Lord is unknown.

1. *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”*⁹⁴
2. *“And did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*⁹⁵ This refers to the days of Noah when the flood came and took the people away when they were not expecting it.

⁹¹ Matthew 24:4-15

⁹² Matthew 24:36

⁹³ Matthew 24:39

⁹⁴ Matthew 24:36

3. *“Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”*⁹⁶

The catching up of living saints at the Second or Final Coming of the Lord is being spoken of by Jesus when He said, *“Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.”*⁹⁷ In light of that sudden happening at an unexpected time, disciples are urged to be ready since *“you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”* This could not be associated with verses 4 – 34 as Jesus had outlined a definite and specific progression of events leading up to a consummation.

4. *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*⁹⁸ Prior to this admonition, Jesus spoke of a thief coming at an unexpected hour and concludes by saying, *“for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

5. *“The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of.”*⁹⁹ This sentence is the emphasis given to an illustration Jesus gives of a master who gave stewardship to a servant. He pictures a circumstance when the servant concludes that the master has delayed his coming and begins to be unfaithful over his stewardship. Then, the master comes on an unexpected day and at an unexpected hour to bring punishment on the evil servant. What is the emphasis? The theme here is readiness in light of the fact of the unexpected coming of Christ. Could this

⁹⁵ Matthew 24:37

⁹⁶ Matthew 24:42

⁹⁷ Matthew 24:40, 41

⁹⁸ Matthew 24:44

⁹⁹ Matthew 24:50

be the same discussion of the definite and precise chain of predicted and foreseen events leading up to an “end” Jesus discussed in the first thirty-four verses?

Further, the first thirty-four verses have to do with a local judgment coming on the city of Jerusalem and not events happening to the whole world. Jesus says to His disciples, *“Do you not see all these things (temple and buildings of the temple)? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*¹⁰⁰ This is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. That this is true is further emphasized by His saying, *“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”*¹⁰¹ What is the “holy place” referred to? Obviously, this is the temple of the Jews, which was situated in the city of Jerusalem in Judea. Jesus admonished prayer regarding a possible attack leading to the necessity of flight on the Sabbath. Only Jews would have been affected by such a concern. Hence, verses one through thirty-four speak of a local judgment coming on the Jews.

Yet, from verse thirty-six, the tone changes from a local judgment to a universal judgment. The illustration of the flood in the days of Noah was a universal judgment. The coming of the Lord spoken of in this text is described in the following words. *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”*¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 24:2

¹⁰¹ Matthew 24:15, 16

¹⁰² Matthew 24:31, 32

It would be difficult to think of verses thirty-six forward as anything but the Second or Final Coming of Christ.

Jesus' Answer to the Disciples' First Question: The Destruction of Jerusalem

As Jesus and His disciples were exiting Jerusalem, the disciples began to admire the temple with its buildings. It was, then, that Jesus said, "*Do you see all these things?*"¹⁰³ He, quite obviously, has reference to the temple and buildings of the temple. He continued, "*Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*"¹⁰⁴ Jesus had just predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The question Jesus' disciples asked Him manifested that they understood, clearly, that He had just predicted the destruction of the temple, but their second question, also, manifested a common misunderstanding of the existence of the temple relative to eschatological considerations.

The disciples immediately inquired, "*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*"¹⁰⁵ "The disciples may have assumed that all of these things would transpire at the same time, but Jesus answered their questions in the order in which they asked them."¹⁰⁶

The disciples' questions can be broken down into these components.

1. When will the Jerusalem temple be destroyed? This is seen in the question, "*When will these things be?*" "*These things*" must refer to the immediate context of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple and temple buildings.

¹⁰³ Matthew 24:2a

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 24:2b

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 24:3

¹⁰⁶ Alan E. Highers, "An Analysis of Matthew 24," *The Spiritual Sword*, Vol.30, No. 2 (January, 1999) 11.

2. The disciples' next question had to do with a coming of Christ and the end of the world or end of the age. Cecil May points out, in effect, that the question the disciples asked here implies that they associated any absolute destruction of the Jewish temple with the *coming of the Lord* and *the end of the age*. He writes:

They (Jesus' disciples), no doubt, thought that the one could not be without the other. If the dwelling place of God among the people of Israel was again to be destroyed, surely it must be at the end of all things. However, in his answer Jesus very emphatically shows that they are not the same. There are signs of the coming of the first event; none of the second. The approximate time of the first can be told; no one knows the time of the second. The final sign of the imminent destruction of the temple and city is a signal to flee; but surely no flight will be in order when Christ comes in the final judgment. Where could one go?¹⁰⁷

Kik notes the following on this issue of the nature of the disciples' question concerning the *coming of the Lord* and the *end of the age* being associated in their minds with the destruction of the Jewish temple. He writes:

The fact that the disciples asked Christ concerning the end of the age presents a problem to us. What did the disciples mean by the end of the age? There is no doubt that to the disciples the destruction of the Temple and the end of the age were one and the same thing. The fact that both Mark and Luke omit the expression, "*the end of the age*," would indicate this. If the expression was an altogether different idea no doubt Mark and Luke would have included it. But since in their minds the destruction of the Temple was simultaneous with the end of the age they omitted it.¹⁰⁸

Kik continues with these enlightening points regarding what the disciples understood and the answer Jesus gave which exceed the limits of their understanding about the destruction of the Jewish temple and, yet, the continuation of time.

¹⁰⁷ Cecil May, "*Matthew 24*," (M.A. Thesis, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, 1967) 16.

¹⁰⁸ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 32.

The disciples, of course, did not doubt that the words of Christ would be literally fulfilled. So upon the Mount of Olives, they asked Him privately: *“Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?”* This question is very important in our understanding of the prophecy that follows. We must never forget that the prophecy is an answer to the question of the disciples. This does not mean that the disciples had a distinct understanding of what their question involved.¹⁰⁹

Without doubt, the disciples had often demonstrated a failure to understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom and the purpose of His mission.¹¹⁰ Therefore, it should be no surprise to us that their view of the end of the age and what that might involve was incorrect. Further, the general concept that “the Temple would remain throughout the new age introduced by the Messiah”¹¹¹ was a common misconception. Old Testament prophecies spoke of the continuing or eternal nature of the Temple.¹¹² God through Amos said, *“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old... And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.”*¹¹³ The picture of a permanence of the Jews in the land again with a rebuild temple as in the days of old could easily be interpreted that in the age of the Messiah that the temple would never be destroyed. These passages would not be understood for their spiritual fulfillment until after the Day of Pentecost.¹¹⁴ Thus, for the disciples to associate the end of the world and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 28.

¹¹⁰ Matthew 16:13-21; 20:20-28; Acts 1:6;

¹¹¹ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 30.

¹¹² Psalm 78:68, 69; 2 Chronicles 30:8

¹¹³ Amos 9:11-15

¹¹⁴ Amos 9:11-15 quoted in Acts 15:13-21 indicating a spiritual fulfillment.

the Second Coming of Christ with the destruction of the Jewish temple was completely understandable, even if it were completely false.

Further, what was Jesus' disciples understanding (at this point) of eschatology based on Jesus' previous teachings?

According to the Jews there were to be two ages: "This age" and "the age to come"—the pre-Messianic age and the Messianic age. We believe that in Matthew the question has reference to the end of the Messianic age. In the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13:39, 40, the disciples had been taught that the Judgment would come at the end of the age. This could only be the Messianic age. So also it is taught in the Parable of the Drag Net. This parable concludes in Matthew 13:49: "So shall it be at the end of the age: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just." This indicates the meaning of the expression, "the end of the age," in Matthew's Gospel. So when the disciples asked for the sign of the end of the age they were asking for the sign of the end of the Messianic age...to the disciples the destruction of the Temple and the end of the age were to be at the same time.¹¹⁵

It seems from teachings Jesus had done that they would have understood (or at least been exposed to the idea) that there would be "*an end of the age*"¹¹⁶ when a harvest would come and the evil burned in the fire. There would be a separation of the bad and the good at the "*end of the age.*"¹¹⁷

R. L. White provides another angle on this subject.

It is assumed by many that in Matthew's account they were inquiring about his second coming; but it does not seem possible that they could be asking a question about his second coming, for they did not then believe that he would go away! Of his second coming they knew nothing and believed nothing. It was not in the range of their thoughts...They, of course, held the common view among the Jews that the Christ would not die, but abide forever.

¹¹⁵ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 32, 33.

¹¹⁶ Matthew 13:39

¹¹⁷ Matthew 13:49

But when he did die, their hopes were, therefore, blasted. When some report that he had arisen, others did not believe it. How, then, could they have been asking a question about his second coming?¹¹⁸

If Jesus disciples could not have been inquiring about His second coming, then what were they asking when they inquired, “*What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the world (age)?*”

The disciples believed Jesus to be the Messiah; they believed he would establish his reign in Jerusalem. To do so they knew that the present Jewish world, or age, would have to come to an end. He would have to make a destructive war on the city. Now, what shall be the sign when you are to come in such judgments upon this city? But Jesus would not in person destroy the city; that would be done by others. Jesus proceeds to tell them. Hence, the end spoken of is the end of Jerusalem as the capital city of the Jews and the end of the temple, which would mean the end of the Jewish nation. It would be accomplished during that generation.”¹¹⁹

Jesus begins by answering the disciples first question—“*When shall these things be?*” He indicates that the following things would happen before the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. It should be noted that most, if not all, these indicators, such as earthquakes, wars, etc., could be found in every generation up to today since Jesus first spoke these words, but one is to remember that Jesus said these would be fulfilled in the generation living when He spoke these words.¹²⁰ If one feels these words can be interpreted beyond the days of Christ, various interpretations may be placed upon Jesus’ indicators. John F. Walvoord, a pre-millennialist, writes about the developments in our present world seeing fulfillment in Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:4-34. He writes:

¹¹⁸ R. L. Whiteside, “Queries and Answers Department,” *Gospel Advocate*, Vol. LXXIX, 18, 6 May 1937, 419.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Matthew 24:34

In the Scriptures, the words of Christ to His disciples on the Mount of Olives delivered not long before He died have dramatic contemporary significance. In this discourse, Christ answered their questions concerning the signs of the end of the age and of His second coming. This revelation becomes increasingly vital to understanding the meaning of events that are occurring today. Matthew 24 and 25 present Christ's discourse on the end of the age, His predictions of the events which lead up to and climax in His second coming to earth. In addition, Matthew 25:31-46 reveal the events which immediately follow His second advent. A study of these prophecies will help one to understand the headlines of our newspapers today, and major events and trends of our twentieth century.¹²¹

Others believe the Jewish nation to be gone by the time Matthew is uttered because of Jesus rebuke of the Pharisees (Matthew 23), because of His cleansing of the temple, Jesus' parables of judgment on the Jews and God's farewell to Israel in Matthew 21:43. Bruce Ware, evaluating this view held by Robert Gundry, said, "Gundry concludes from this that since Israel is out of the picture (having been rejected by God), Jesus then in Matthew 24 outlined the chronology of the present age, relating to the church."¹²²

Wallace writes, "Answering the question—'What shall be the sign of they coming?' Jesus told them plainly there would be none. 'Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' There would be no sign of his coming."¹²³

¹²¹ John F. Walvoord, "Christ Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age," *Bibliotheca sacra*, 128.0510, ATLA Serials, 110.

¹²² Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company), 129-139; quoted in Bruce Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24-25?" *Bibliotheca sacra* 138.0550 (ATLA Serials, 2001) 160.

¹²³ Foy E. Wallace, *God's Prophetic Word* (Oklahoma City: Foy E. Wallace Publications, 1960) 233.

In the time-text of Matthew 24:34 Jesus said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*”¹²⁴

John MacArthur, noted pre-millennialist, writes:

The events of Matthew 24 are much too universal and cataclysmic to represent the dreadful but geographically limited devastation of Jerusalem. That did not involve ‘famines and earthquakes’ (Matt.24:7), believers’ being ‘hated by all nations,’ (v.9), false Christs and false prophets (v.5, 11), the preaching of the gospel to the whole world (v. 14), or the abomination of desolation (v. 15). Nor were the sun darkened, the moon extinguished, or the stars dislodged from their places (v. 29). Most important of all, Jesus certainly did not appear then.¹²⁵

Can Mr. MacArthur’s objections to a pre-A.D. 70 fulfillment of Matthew 24:1-34 be answered?

In light of fulfillments in the generation to which Jesus spoke, consider these predictions and their fulfillments. Cecil May chronicles various fulfillments of these various indicators or signs, which happened prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

1. **False Christ.** “*Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.*”¹²⁶ One does not have to go beyond the first century to find fulfillment of this prediction. Judas of Galilee led a revolt not long after the birth of Christ. “Josephus dates the ‘foundation’ of the final rebellion which ‘brought the public to destruction’ to the ‘infection’ which spread from Judas’ claim to be God’s deliverer.”¹²⁷ Judas’ two sons were executed about fifteen years after Jesus’ crucifixion. Gamaliel, a teacher of the

¹²⁴ Matthew 24:34

¹²⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24 – 28* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 63, 64.

¹²⁶ Matthew 24:4, 5

¹²⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* xvii. 1. 1., quoted by Cecil May, “*Matthew 24,*” (M.A. Thesis, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, 1967) 17.

law and a member of the Jewish ruling body which drilled Peter, reasoned privately with his counterparts, saying:

For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.¹²⁸

2. **Wars and Rumors of Wars.** “Philo tells of a disturbance between Jews and Greeks at Alexander about A.D. 38.”¹²⁹

Jews and Syrians had such a disagreement in Babylon that the Jewish colony withdrew and moved to Seleucia, but the dispute continued and in the ensuing conflict 50,000 Jews were slain.”¹³⁰ “At Caesarea the Jews were expelled for not giving proper obeisance to Caesar (Caligula) and Josephus says 20,000 of them were slain in one hour. The Jews retaliated by burning and plundering neighboring cities and the inhabitants responded with Roman help. The resulting was the slaying of 13,000 Jews at Scythopolis, 2,500 at Ascalon, 2,000 at Ptolemais, besides great numbers of prisoners that were taken.¹³¹

There was a fifty-day standoff between Caligula and the Jews concerning his intention to erect his statute in the temple. This was only eased by his sudden death.

3. **Famines, Pestilence and Earthquakes.** The prophet, Agabus, predicted a severe famine, which would take place during the days of Claudius Caesar.¹³² “D. K. Kallmer-Amiran, a recognized authority in the history of Israel, reports four

¹²⁸ Acts 5:36-37

¹²⁹ Philo, *De Legatione*, 120-151, quoted by Cecil May, “*Matthew 24*,” (M.A. Thesis, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, 1967) 18.

¹³⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* xviii, 9. 8-9. quoted by Cecil May, “*Matthew 24*,” (M.A. Thesis, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, 1967) 17.

¹³¹ Josephus, *Wars*, ii. 18. 1ff. quoted by Cecil May, “*Matthew 24*,” (M.A. Thesis, Harding College Graduate School of Religion, 1967) 19.

¹³² Acts 11:28

earthquakes in Palestine in the two decades following this discourse, more than for any similar period over 800 years afterward.”¹³³ The earthquake, which caused Mount Vesuvius to erupt, destroyed Pompeii on February 5, 63 A.D. Pestilence was a natural occurrence in times of famines.

4. **Persecution of the Apostles.** Apostles are threatened, beaten and imprisoned in Jerusalem.¹³⁴ Steven is martyred at the hands of a group of Alexandrian Jews.¹³⁵ General persecution hits the church in Jerusalem causing the saints to scatter.¹³⁶ Saul of Tarsus led the persecution of saints into other cities.¹³⁷ An attempt was made on the life of the converted Saul of Tarsus in Jerusalem after his return from Arabia.¹³⁸ Herod Agrippa I, ruler of Palestine from A.D. 41 to 44, killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter.¹³⁹ Paul and Barnabas are persecuted in the city of Antioch of Pisidia on the First Missionary Journey.¹⁴⁰ “*A violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them (Paul and Barnabas)*” in Iconium.¹⁴¹ Paul is stoned and left for dead in Derbe on that same First Missionary Journey.¹⁴² Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned in Philippi on the Second Missionary Journey.¹⁴³ Paul and Silas are

¹³³ D. K. Kallmer-Amiran, “Revised Earthquake-Catalogue of Palestine,” *Israel Exploration Journal*, 1:225, quoted by Cecil May, *The Destruction of Jerusalem, Studies in Luke, 14th Annual East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Lectureship*, (Tennessee: East Tennessee School of Preaching, 1988), 248.

¹³⁴ Acts 4:13-22; 5:40-42

¹³⁵ Acts 7:57-60

¹³⁶ Acts 8:1

¹³⁷ Acts 9

¹³⁸ Acts 9:29

¹³⁹ Acts 12:1-3

¹⁴⁰ Acts 13:50

¹⁴¹ Acts 14:5

¹⁴² Acts 14:19, 20

¹⁴³ Acts 16:19-24

run from the city of Thessalonica on the same journey.¹⁴⁴ Paul is tried before Gallio, the proconsul of Asia (A.D. 51).¹⁴⁵ A great riot in Ephesus causes Paul to leave Ephesus after three years.¹⁴⁶ Following Paul's Third Missionary Journey, riot in Jerusalem causes his being detained by the Romans.¹⁴⁷ Paul spends two years in prison in Caesarea being brought before the Sanhedrin, Felix (the governor), Festus (governor who succeeded Felix in A.D. 60), and King Agrippa II.¹⁴⁸ Paul would then spend two years in his own hired dwelling in Rome guarded day and night.¹⁴⁹

5. Lawlessness and Apostasy. Hymenaeus and Alexander made shipwreck of their faith at Ephesus.¹⁵⁰ Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders nearing the end of his Third Missionary Journey, foretold apostasy saying, "*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*"¹⁵¹ Phygellus and Hermogenes turned away from Paul.¹⁵² Demas forsook Paul because of his affections for this world.¹⁵³ If the traditional date of the Book of Revelation is not accepted, we can see the Ephesians losing their first love,¹⁵⁴ the church at Pergamos having those who

¹⁴⁴ Acts 17:5

¹⁴⁵ Acts 18:12

¹⁴⁶ Acts 19:23-41

¹⁴⁷ Acts 21:27-40

¹⁴⁸ Acts 22-26

¹⁴⁹ Acts 28:30, 31; Philippians 1:12-18

¹⁵⁰ I Timothy 1:18-20

¹⁵¹ Acts 20:29, 30

¹⁵² 2 Timothy 1:15

¹⁵³ 2 Timothy 4:10

¹⁵⁴ Revelation 2:4

taught the doctrine of compromise,¹⁵⁵ the church at Thyatira had allowed sexual immorality into its ranks,¹⁵⁶ the church at Sardis who was dead spiritually and most of them had “*defiled their garments*”¹⁵⁷ and Laodicea had become lukewarm.¹⁵⁸ The churches of Galatia had some who wanted “*to pervert the gospel of Christ.*”¹⁵⁹ The Philippian church had “*dogs and evil workers*” seeking to get them to be circumcised and not trust Christ.¹⁶⁰ Down in the Lycos Valley of lower Asia, the Colossians had Gnostic false teachers teaching that Jesus was not deity or that He had not come in the flesh.¹⁶¹ Pseudo-apostolic letters were circulating at Thessalonica¹⁶² and there were those who had quit working thinking the return of Christ was imminent.¹⁶³ Hebrew Christians were being influenced and tempted to go back to the shadows of Jewish religion and to leave Christ.¹⁶⁴

6. Gospel of the Kingdom Preached in All the World. From confinement in Rome (A.D. 62), Paul wrote to the Colossians, “*(Gospel), which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit...*”¹⁶⁵ Further, Paul writing to the same congregation said, “*If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel*

¹⁵⁵ Revelation 2:14

¹⁵⁶ Revelation 2:20

¹⁵⁷ Revelation 3:1, 4

¹⁵⁸ Revelation 3:16

¹⁵⁹ Galatians 1:7

¹⁶⁰ Philippians 3:1, 2

¹⁶¹ Colossians 1:15; 2:9

¹⁶² 2 Thessalonians 2:2

¹⁶³ 2 Thessalonians 3:6ff

¹⁶⁴ Book of Hebrews

¹⁶⁵ Colossians 1:5, 6

which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."¹⁶⁶

7. **Abomination of Desolation.** Jesus said, "Therefore, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place..then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."¹⁶⁷ Luke said that armies would surround Jerusalem and this would lead to its desolation.¹⁶⁸ The Roman legions under Titus came brought about this destruction in A.D. 70. Note some of the things Jesus said would describe and or lead up to this time of desolation.

- **A Progression Towards a Consummation.** A series of events, herein elaborated on, would lead up to the final signal for believing Jews (Christians) to exit the city. Demonstrating the progressive nature of these events leading to a consummation, Jesus said:

*And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars...**but the end is not yet**...And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All of these are the **beginnings of sorrows**...And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who **endures to the end shall be saved**. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and **then the end will come**.¹⁶⁹ But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its **desolation is near**.¹⁷⁰ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away **till all these things take place**.¹⁷¹*

¹⁶⁶ Colossians 1:23

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 24:15

¹⁶⁸ Luke 21:20

¹⁶⁹ Matthew 24:6-14

¹⁷⁰ Luke 21:20

¹⁷¹ Matthew 24:34

The final sign for believing Jews to flee the city of Jerusalem was when they saw “*the abomination of desolation,*”¹⁷² which is noted by Luke to be armies surrounding Jerusalem.¹⁷³ This happened in A.D. 70.

▪ **Language Bespeaking Local Judgment.**

1. “*Flee to the Mountains.*”¹⁷⁴ One cannot image where anyone would flee if this were speaking of the final coming of Christ, nor the need for Christians to flee if it were the final coming of Christ. But, if these are the admonitions of Jesus to believing Jews when they saw the Roman armies coming to surround Jerusalem then these words fit that local judgment on Jerusalem. On this subject, Wallace writes:

It is a remarkable but historical fact that Cestius Gallius, the Roman general, for some unknown reason, retired when they first marched against the city, suspended the siege, ceased their attack and withdrew his armies for an interval of time after the Romans occupied the temple, thus giving every believing Jew the opportunity to obey the Lord’s instruction to flee the city. Josephus the eyewitness, himself an unbeliever, chronicles this fact, and admitted his inability to account for the cessation of the fighting at the time, after a siege had begun.¹⁷⁵

2. *Special Hardships of Flight.* One can see the language used by Jesus has specific application to the flight believing Jews might face when the armies surrounded Jerusalem. Jesus said, “*Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!*”¹⁷⁶ This language would have little meaning placed in a context of the final

¹⁷² Matthew 24:15

¹⁷³ Luke 21:20

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 24:16

¹⁷⁵ Foy E. Wallace, *God’s Prophetic Word* (Oklahoma City: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications, 1946) 252.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 24:19

coming of Christ, but in a context of Roman legions surrounding Jerusalem we can understand or imagine the special hardships, which would come on mothers nursing infant. Further, a flight on the Sabbath¹⁷⁷ would be problematic due either to Jewish Christians still having a conscience about the Sabbath and certain restrictions placed on the distance one might go lawfully and/or the Zealots' policing and seeking to enforce such. Of course, winter flight¹⁷⁸ would have no application to a final coming of Christ, but every application to having to face the elements in a flight from Jerusalem in the wake of the advancing legions of Rome.

3. *Great Tribulation.* Jesus said, "*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*"¹⁷⁹ Pre-millennialist, no doubt, would seek to make the point that such could not have had a pre-A.D. 70 fulfillment. Yet, on this point, William Barclay says:

Josephus tells a dreadful story of a woman who in those days actually killed and roasted and ate her suckling child (6. 3. 4). He tells us that even the Romans, when they had taken the city and were going through it to plunder, were so stricken with horror at the sights they saw that they could not but stay their hands...Josephus himself shared in the horrors of this siege, and he tells us that 97,000 were taken captive and enslaved, and 1,100,000 died.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 24:20

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 24:20

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 24:21

¹⁸⁰ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2: Chapters 11 to 28* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976) 307, 308.

Jesus continued, “*And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.*”¹⁸¹ If the judgment on Jerusalem had continued, it would have likely spread out regionally jeopardizing the believing or “elect” Jewish Christians.

4. *False christs and Deceiving Signs.* Jesus foretold, “*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*”¹⁸² Kik refers to Josephus’ recording of an incident during the siege when a cloister of six thousand Jews (including women and children) fled to the outer temple on the word of a prophet who had “made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance.”¹⁸³ Other false prophets denounced this prophet’s words saying the multitudes should await the deliverance from God.

Josephus also records the extraordinary signs and wonders that appeared. He tells of a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city. A great light appeared for a half hour around the temple.¹⁸⁴

5. *Prophetic Expressions of Judgment in Time.*
 - a. Coming of Jesus Compared to Lightning. No one can hide the sight of lightning from people on the earth. Hence, the progression of events leading up to the destruction of

¹⁸¹ Matthew 24:22

¹⁸² Matthew 24:24

¹⁸³ J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew 24* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1948) 61.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Jerusalem would be visible to all observers. Further, the marching legions of Rome would be the final visible sign.

b. Gathering of the Eagles (Vultures) Over a Carcass. The standard of the Roman legions was the eagle and the “carcass” over which they gathered was the Jewish nation—specifically Jerusalem.

c. Celestial Wonders. Jesus indicated that “*after the tribulation of those days*” that the sun would be darkened, the moon would not give its light and that the stars would fall from the heaven.¹⁸⁵ In describing the downfall of the Babylonian empire,¹⁸⁶ God, through Isaiah, describes the end of Babylon saying, “*For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light: the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.*”¹⁸⁷ Such metaphoric language indicated the downfall of a nation in Isaiah’s prophecy and this same language is employed by Jesus to foretell the downfall of the nation of Israel in A.D. 70.

d. Son of Man Coming on the Clouds. The picture of God coming on a cloud(s) is employed in prophesy of the Old Testament to bespeak the downfall of empires. In speaking of the coming downfall of Egypt, God through Isaiah said, “*The burden against Egypt, Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud,*

¹⁸⁵ Matthew 24:29

¹⁸⁶ Isaiah 13:1, 2

¹⁸⁷ Isaiah 13:10

and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.”¹⁸⁸

- e. Angels Gathering the Elect. Jesus said this, among other coming events, would happen “*after the tribulation of those days.*”¹⁸⁹ The word “*angels*” means “*messengers.*” “ἄγγελος *aggelos* {ang'-el-os} meaning: a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God.”¹⁹⁰ How would the “*messengers*” gather the “*elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other?*” The apostles and ancient preachers of Christianity in the first century would announce the gospel to the Jewish nation and to all nations. Would the elect be gathered by that preaching? Paul wrote, “*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 has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...*”¹⁹¹ The gathering force to call men the true Israel of God out of the world would be the gospel of Christ.¹⁹²
- f. Parable of the Fig Tree. The maturing of the fig tree with its tender limbs and leaves in this context seems to be an illustration of a progression leading to a consummation. In this

¹⁸⁸ Isaiah 19:1

¹⁸⁹ Matthew 24:29a

¹⁹⁰ Strong, Noted in Bible Works 5.0.

¹⁹¹ Romans 11:25, 26

¹⁹² 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14

context of Matthew 24 verses 4 through 31 Jesus had foretold a progression of events which would lead up to a final consummation on Jerusalem. If people were able to discern the changing of the seasons as seen in the fig tree coming into bloom, then they could certainly discern the progressive chain of events leading up to the end of Jerusalem.

- g. Conclusion. Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”*¹⁹³ Since this is previously discussed at some length in this paper, suffice it to say, at this point, that this series of visible events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem would all take place in the generation Jesus spoke these words.

Jesus Answer to the Disciples’ Second Question: The End of the Age

What did the disciples mean and what did they understand when they asked, *“And what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?”*¹⁹⁴ Did Jesus come, in a sense, in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70? Isaiah 19:1 indicates that God came on a cloud to judge Egypt. Yet, any such *“comings”* of the Lord to bring judgment in time on a nation does not seem to be the *“coming”* spoken of by Jesus beyond the time-text of Matthew 24:34. As has been discussed, Jesus moves from the definite progression of events which would be visible to all to a time coming which was unknown in Matthew 24:36. He says, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,*

¹⁹³ Matthew 24:34.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 24:2b

*but My Father only.*¹⁹⁵ The transition in the language is remarkable and cannot be missed. Regardless of the understanding and question of Jesus' disciples, Jesus is speaking of a time, which is coming that is known only by the Father in heaven. This is the time spoken of by John as a time the righteous and unrighteous dead will be raised to life and judgment, respectively.¹⁹⁶ It is the day spoken of by Paul of the final return of the Lord with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God effecting the resurrection of the righteous dead, the glorification of the righteous living and the catching up of both groups into the heavens to ever be with the Lord.¹⁹⁷ It is of that time when death will be overruled by life and victory and there will be a resurrection of the righteous dead and a glorification of all saints from being mortal to being immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible and from earthly to spiritual.¹⁹⁸ This unknown time will be the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ when people will be going about their daily routines of life (as in the days of Noah) having ignored the gospel of Christ. And just as the flood caught those who cared not for the truth of God in that generation preached by Enoch and Noah, so the final coming of the Lord will fine those who paid no heed unprepared as well.¹⁹⁹ And, those who had made a beginning in Christ, but had grown unfaithful will be judged just as surely as the unfaithful servant who grew tired of waiting for the coming of his master and who begin to fail in his duties.²⁰⁰

Conclusion

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 24:36

¹⁹⁶ John 5:28, 29

¹⁹⁷ 2 Thessalonians 4:13ff

¹⁹⁸ I Corinthians 15:51-58

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 24:36-44

²⁰⁰ Matthew 24:45-51

The researcher is fully aware of the limitations of this study, including need for thorough language and syntax investigations, deeper historical investigations, more examination of differing schools of thought, etc. Yet, this study has revealed that there is solid ground for the following conclusions.

First, that there was a clear and discernible sequence of events that led up to the destruction of Jerusalem and that those events culminated in the armies of Rome surrounding Jerusalem and destroying the same and that those events described in the first thirty-four verses of Matthew 24 outline those events that would occur in that generation.

Second, there is the clearest of distinctions between that discernible progression of events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem spoken of in Matthew 24:4-34 and the unknown time of the final return of the Lord spoken of in Matthew 24:36ff.