

DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Matthew 24-24

I. INTRODUCTION.

Parts of these chapters, and especially of Chapter 24, are highly controversial, with some of the controversies hinging on technicalities of language and/or taking passages out of context and weaving them into theories otherwise unsupported by scripture, by many sensationalists who in every generation insist that the signs of the time infallibly indicate the second coming of Christ to be at hand. Hence, careful scrutiny is needed to arrive at the meaning of the controverted passages as best we reasonably can, as well as to profit personally by enriching our own knowledge of the Word and sharing that knowledge with others as opportunity may be afforded.

Instead of the writer simply setting forth his own viewpoint and leaving it at that, which would be far simpler, he has chosen to set forth different aspects of the more highly controverted points, and work through them with the readers, to allow them to see his own process of reasoning and why arriving at his conclusions or heavy leanings, as the case may be. This method may be a matter of tedium, and quite boring, to some. But it seems necessary for the sake of any who are especially interested in a careful consideration of crucial points and in deciding for themselves whether to accept the writer's viewpoint. So we ask your forbearance, please.

As a part of this introduction, an overview containing some fundamental information is given before attempting to present a somewhat systematic outline and more or less detailed discussion of our Lord's memorable discourse. Also at the close, a brief running summary will give at a glance the writer's own basic over-all analysis.

1. Setting.

As Jesus left the temple in Jerusalem on the last day of public ministry before his crucifixion, his disciples "show him the buildings of the temple" (some of the stones being as much as 75 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide, according to Josephus). And Jesus tells them, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down ". And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives opposite the temple a short distance eastward across the brook Kidron, his disciples came to him privately and asked, "Tell us, (a) when shall these things be? and (b) what shall be the sign (1) of thy coming, and (2) the end of the world"

(Matthew 24:1-3). The remainder of Chapter 24 and all of Chapter 25 give Christ's discourse in reply.

Parallel accounts (of Chapter 24 only) are found in Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 21:5-36, with occasional supplementary information (either clarifying Matthew in some instances or vice versa in others). Mark tells that the disciples who came to Jesus privately to ask about these things they asked, "Tell us, When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (v. 4). And Luke (21:7) records it similarly: "Teacher, when therefore shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when these things are about to come to pass"? This indicates that in the mind of the disciples, as depicted by Matthew, the destruction of the temple would occur at the coming of Christ and the end of the world, and we shall find Jesus disabusing their minds of that concept, and showing the temple's and Jerusalem's destruction as being prior to his "coming" that they had in mind.

The "coming" they had in mind is expressed by the Greek word *parousia*, literally meaning "presence", but used for the presence of one coming, hence "the coming, arrival, advent" – employed in the New Testament as a technical term, mostly of "the advent, i.e. the future, visible, return from heaven of Jesus, the Messiah" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).

Parousia occurs again in Matthew 24 in verses 27, 37, and 39, but not in the accounts of Mark and Luke, where it is not featured as by Matthew.

A more general work for "coming" is *erchomai*, and as applied to Christ's coming it may refer to his *parousia*, but not necessarily so, depending on context. As examples, it is used in Matthew 16:27 and 25:31 of his *parousia*, but in Matthew 16:28 it is used figuratively of his "coming" in his kingdom on Pentecost after his death and resurrection, at the time his kingdom "comes" (Mark 9:1). It also occurs in Matthew 24:30,44. In v.44 it refers to the *parousia*, but in v.30 its use is controverted and involved in the "problem" mentioned below. (NOTE: *Erchomai* is a verb, whereas *parousia* is a noun – a "presence" resulting from "coming" or "arriving".)

The expression, "the end of the world", in Matthew 24:3, is the same as in 28:19 (literally, "the consummation of the age", and most likely refers to the completion of the Messianic or Christian age, which will be at the *parousia* of Christ. Note also the following use of "world" (*aionos*, age) by Christ in Luke 20:34-36: "The sons of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: for neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels: and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" – which will be "the (ultimate) revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19)". Note also that, in Christ's language, the resurrection of the righteous is to be at "the last day" (John 6:39,40,44,54; cf. 11:24; 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Likewise, in the language of the apostle Paul the resurrection is at Christ's "coming" (*parousia*), when also comes "the end" (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

2. Problem.

a. Most of the text of Chapter 24 through v.34 has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred A.D. 70, within the lifetime of a part of the generation contemporary with Jesus. But vs. 29-31, called by some the "Little Apocalypse", are an exception and will be given extended consideration when coming to them in the detailed study of the text. They describe events "immediately after the tribulation of those days" – understood by some

interpreters as referring to (1) the second personal coming of Christ at the end of the world, to be elaborated upon in 24:35 - 25:46; and understood by others as referring to (2) a figurative coming of Christ in a supposed great surge of world-wide evangelism (cf. Ephesians 2:17) after the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state, with diminished opposition from Jews and Judaizers.

Another interpretation (3) is that it refers to a conjectured seven-year tribulation period yet future immediately before a fancied coming of Christ to establish the kingdom prophesied and promised in connection with his first coming but could not be inaugurated then because the Jews rejected him and he had to substitute the church as a temporary and interim expedient.

But we shall have to reject this outright and not give it further attention other than possibly an occasional allusion, (a) because that tribulation is documented by taking 24:21 out of its context of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and applying it where the scriptures do not; (b) because it is pure fabrication with reference to postponing the kingdom and substituting the church as a temporary expedient; and (c) because it postulates two literal comings of Christ more than a thousand years prior to the end of the world, that the scriptures do not themselves support, besides other perversions that we may refer to occasionally. The first such coming, according to the theory, is to be immediately before the tribulation, to "rapture" the saints, living and dead, so that they should not experience said tribulation. And the second such coming is to be a return to the earth immediately after that tribulation to set up a earthly kingdom, in which Christ is to reign 1,000 years on David's literal throne from the city of Jerusalem with his saints – that 1,000 years ending a short time before the *parousia* of Christ at the end of the world, when the general resurrection and judgment occur and the world that now is ceases to be.

A less frequent interpretation (5) is that v.29 is figurative, but refers to the beginning of a great apostasy of the church that would produce the "Dark Ages" of European Christendom during the

long night of the Middle Ages (between the fall of the West Roman Empire in the 5th century A.D. and the Renaissance in the 15th century A.D. – and that vs. 30-31 are literal, to be fulfilled a long time afterward, when the sign of the Son of man coming with power and great glory at the end of the world will be seen and produce great mourning on the part of the wicked – which would make it the *parousia*.

But, because this interpretation of vs.29 appears to be beyond the scope of the questions Jesus was answering – and because its separation of vs. 30-31 from v.29 by a long period of time is glaringly inconsistent with the parallel passages of Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:25-28 as well, all of which definitely place the coming of the Son of man at the time of what happens to the sun, moon, and stars – it is here and now rejected without further attention in this paper. That leaves only (1) and (2) above to be considered in the verse by verse study to follow.

Another "great tribulation" interpretation (4) is as follows: "Before the reappearing of Christ, the opposition to his followers, their sufferings and distresses will reach their climax in a "great tribulation" which immediately precedes the appearance of the King. This event is painted so vividly in colors borrowed from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that it is difficult to distinguish between the reference to the two events. The sign which immediately precedes the beginning of the great tribulation is described as 'the abomination of desolation'. In the case of the destruction of Jerusalem, this is supposed by many to have been the royal standards, or the Roman armies; but in the case of the tribulation at the end of the age, it is understood to refer to the appearance of the 'antichrist', the 'man of sin', to whom the other New Testament writers refer. It is under his rule and tyranny that there will be 'great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be'. Were it not for the diving intervention that has been determined, it would appear that none would survive this reign of savagery and horror.... Their Deliverer is to appear from heaven; his coming is

to be 'as the lightening cometh forth from the east, and seen even unto the west'. (Charles R. Erdman, Commentary on Matthew 24:15-28; followed by comments on vs.29-31, beginning as follows: "The great tribulation at the end of the age is to be ended by the glorious appearing of the king": and this is followed by comments on vs.32-51, in which he says: "Even the generation then living was to witness the destruction of Jerusalem which was in itself to be a type and a sign of the greater event which lay in the more distant future. However long the delay might be, the predictions were certain to be fulfilled; Jesus declared that his words 'shall not pass away'. The exact time of his return, however, was known to no one; of it he, who became man and humbled himself, was voluntarily ignorant; it was known only to the Father".

That does not make "immediately after the tribulation of those days" in vs.29-31 to refer to the tribulation of the days of Jerusalem's destruction, as the context indicates, but to a "great tribulation at the end of the age (that) is to be ended by the glorious appearing of the King", and only "painted ... vividly in colors borrowed from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans" -- "a type and sign of the greater event which lay in the more distant future". By this manner of exegesis, however, one can "prove" or "disprove" almost anything. It is to be rejected as altogether untrustworthy.

(Note: The word for "coming", however, in Matthew 24:30 and parallel passages in Mark 13:26 and Luke 21:27 is a form of *erchomai*, and does not tell us linguistically whether it refers to the parousia or not, as mentioned in the second complete paragraph of the preceding page. And we shall not attempt to determine which at this point, but wait till coming to it in a verse by verse study of the text.)

b. Chapter 24:35 speaks plainly of the passing away of heaven and earth at a time unknown then even by Christ (v.36), followed by a discussion of events associated with the "coming of the Son of man" that continues through Chapter 25. This indicates his "coming" (his *parousia*) to be associated with the passing of

heaven and earth. But this, too, is oppositely interpreted, almost identically with vs.29-31 – by some as referring to (1) the second personal coming of Christ at the end of the world (the *parousia*), and by others as referring to (2) a figurative coming of Christ evangelistically shortly after the end of the Jewish state.

To this student, the word "immediately" (Greek *eutheos*) poses the greatest difficulty to interpretation (1) in both instances above. This is because nearly 2,000 years have since passed, and the *parousia* has still not occurred. Yet all else that is said from 24:35 through 24:46 seems to fit that interpretation rather than (2). And Adam Clarke's commentary, which holds to interpretation (2) in both instances, concedes that 24:31-46 has to be excluded – which would, of course, put it in category (1).

Yet, if 25:31-46 belongs in category (1), as Clarke's concession means, so does all the rest after 24:35. For the several parts of the remainder are so inseparably linked to each other and to judgment at the "coming of the Son of man" (the *parousia*) – and not to evangelism – that evangelism cannot be a part of anything discussed after Matthew 24:35, regardless of what is meant in vs.29-31. Notice therefore the reading of 24:35-37:

"35. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away. 36. But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son but the Father only. 37. And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of man".

Those verses set the tone for all the remainder of Jesus' discourse. We are therefore compelled to treat all the text of 24:35 to 25:46 as eschatological – that is, as pertaining to last things – not to the destruction of Jerusalem.

II. DISCUSSION OF JESUS' DISCOURSE (24:4 – 25:46).

1. Warning Against Being Led Astray by False Claimants (24:4-14).

a. Many would come in Christ's name, saying "I am the Christ", and lead many astray (v.5).

b. There would be wars and rumors of wars, but they were not to be troubled by such news, for they would indeed come to pass, but as long as they are distant "the end is not yet" (v.6) – "not immediately" (Luke 21:9) – not of Jerusalem, and less so of the end of the world at Christ's *parousia*. For there were other events of significance yet to occur before the former, that he would mention. The "end" here, therefore, is likely in contrast with the "beginning" that is, of "travail" in v.8, which would continue till and through the tribulation of Jerusalem's destruction, but not till the "end of the world"

(NOTE: This is one of the passages often taken out of context and applied to our day to prove that the second coming of Christ is very near.)

c. "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (which did happen in various places within the Roman Empire); and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail" (vs.7-8). And Luke 21:11 adds "pestilences; and ... terrors and great signs from heaven".

Great earthquakes, and indefinite number of famines, and pestilences, were all referred to by Roman writers. Such earthquakes included those of Crete (A.D. 46 or 47), Rome (A.D. 51), Apamea, in Phrygia (A.D. 53), Laodicea, in Phrygia (A.D. 60), and Campania, a province of Italy, including Naples (A.D. 62 or 63), and others. Also, among various pestilences, there was one during which 30,000 persons perished in Rome alone.

These events were all mentioned by unbelieving writers, as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Philostratus, and Seneca, not with any reference to the prophecy of Christ but because of their importance historically.

Josephus also records prodigies and signs which he says preceded the destruction of Jerusalem: (1) A star that resembled a sword stood over the city, and a comet that continued a whole year. (2) During the feast of unleavened bread, (a) a light shined for half an hour one night around the altar and temple, making it appear to be bright day time; (b) a heifer being led by the high priest to be sacrificed brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple; and (c) the eastern gate of the temple, which had been closed with difficulty by twenty men, was seen to open of its own accord. (3) A few days after the feast, "Before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities". (4) At the feast of Pentecost, a quaking was felt in the temple, along with a great noise, followed by the sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence". And (5) "still more terrible", says Josephus, during the feast of tabernacles four years prior to the beginning of the war, when the city was in peace and prosperity, one Jesus, son of Ananus, a plebian and husbandman (Eusebius paraphrases it as "a common and ignorant rustic"), suddenly began to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people"!

This, Josephus says, was his cry as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city. Whipped by the Jewish rulers, and then brought before the Roman procurator, where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare, he responded to every stroke of the whip, in the most lamentable tone possible, with "Woe, woe to Jerusalem"! Upon finally being dismissed as a madman, he continued uttering these same words. His cry was loudest at the festivals, and he continued for seven years and five months without growing hoarse or tired, till his cry was fulfilled in the siege of the city. At that time he was going around upon the wall, crying, "Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy house". And, just as he added at the last "Woe, woe to myself also"! a stone out of one of the Roman engines smote him and killed him instantly. (Wars of the Jews, Book VI, Chapter V, Section 3).

d. Travail of Christians prior to destruction of Jerusalem described, with many backsliding, but those enduring to the "end" (probably of the "travail") would be "saved" (likely from the unequalled tribulation of Jerusalem's destruction) (vs.9-13) -- and, if that is not what is meant, then saved in heaven at last.

NOTE: It is possible that we have allusions to this in such passages as Hebrews 10:25 ("the day drawing nigh"); James 5:7-8 ("the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord is at hand", with Matthew 24:29-31 possibly in mind, which will be discussed later); and 1 Peter 4:12-19 ("the fiery trail among you" and "the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God ... us". For as tensions between the Jewish nation and Rome intensified, leading to open warfare in A.D. 66 and the destruction of the former in A.D. 70, life became more difficult for Jews everywhere in the empire, and likewise for Christians -- because prior to the destruction of Jerusalem they, whether Jews or Gentiles, were thought of in the common mind as a Jewish sect (cf. Acts 24:5; 28:22).

e. Gospel of kingdom to be preached in the whole world before the "end" (probably of the "travail" already mentioned, and of the Jewish state in connection with Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70) (v.14).

It is of significance that the seat of the old dispensation and capital of the Jewish state would not be removed before the seed of the new dispensation had been sown throughout the then known world. For the accomplishment of world-wide evangelism within the decade immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, see Colossians 1:5-6, 23.

2. Warning to Flee Prior to Destruction of Jerusalem and Not to be Deceived into Believing His *Parousia* Will be Associated with it (24:15-28).

a. Flee when "ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken through Daniel the prophet (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)

standing in the holy place" (vs. 15-16) – that is "when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand" (Luke 21:20).

NOTE: Josephus' Wars of the Jews relates how that the Roman general Cestius (and "president of the province of Syria"), after briefly besieging Jerusalem unsuccessfully (in A.D. 66), "retired from the city, without any reason in the world" (Chapter XIX, Paragraph 7); also, "After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship that was going to sink" ("Chapter XX, Paragraph 1). Then Titus, another Roman general and son of Vespasian, the new emperor of Rome following the death of Nero (A.D. 68), was sent in April of A.D. 70 to renew the siege of Jerusalem, which fell on September 12th that year – costing the lives of 1,100,000 Jews, according to Josephus. The number was swollen by Jews coming from far and near for the Passover, some of whom also came in hope of finding safety in the city from advancing Romans, only to be shut in it as in a prison.

Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, states: "The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city (eastward), and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan (northward, about 100 miles over all from Jerusalem), called Pella. Here, those that believed in Christ, having removed from Jerusalem, as if holy men had entirely abandoned the royal city itself, and the whole land of Judea; the divine justice, for their crimes against Christ and his apostles, finally overtook them, totally destroying the whole generation of these evildoers from the earth." (Book III, Chapter 5)

b. Flight would need to be with urgency, to avoid being overtaken by the greatest tribulation of all time (vs. 17-22).

Besides the great number of Jews Josephus speaks of as perishing in the destruction of Jerusalem, Luke tells that our Lord said they would also "be led captive into all the nations (Josephus saying 97,000 were carried off): and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of

the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be Fulfilled" (21:24). The latter may refer to the period of Gentile possession and control of Jerusalem, which continued till the present century and is not securely in the hands of Jews even yet.

(McGarvey and Pendleton, in The Fourfold Gospel (1914), had the following interesting comment: "By comparing this passage (Luke 21:24) with Romans xi., we find that the times of the Gentiles signify that period wherein the church is made up of Gentiles to the almost utter exclusion of the Jews. The Same chapter shows that this period is to be followed by one wherein the Jew and the Gentile unite together in proclaiming the gospel. This prophecy, therefore, declares that until this union of the Jew and Gentile takes place, the city of Jerusalem shall not only be controlled by Gentiles but shall be trodden down – i.e., oppressed – by them. This history of Jerusalem, to this day, is a striking fulfillment of this prophecy". (Pp 625-26.)

(Also, Jesus interestingly predicted of Jerusalem, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (by the pending destruction). For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:38-39). Is this saying his *parousia* would not occur until Jerusalem's inhabitants come to welcome disciples of his, and therefore himself?)

In addition to the 1,100,000 Jews that perished during the siege of Jerusalem, and the 97,000 captives taken in the whole war against the Jews, Which began in May of A.D. 66, a total of 1,357,660 others were killed at various places where there were concentrations of Jews (according to the tallies of Josephus) – so that we can see what Jesus meant when he said, "And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

c. Flight not to be interrupted or attention distracted by claims of Christ's *parousia* in various localities (vs.23-26).

d. The *parousia* not to be seen only locally, but like the lightning in the east is seen also in the west, it would itself be seen by all alike (v.27).

e. "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles (margin, or vultures) be gathered together" (v.28).

If to be understood as "eagles," it may refer to the "eagles" of the Roman army (carried on their standards) swooping down upon the "carcass" (corpse) of lifeless Judaism and its capital city (as per Knox).

Or, if understood as "vultures", McGarvey may be correct: "The carcass is the decaying Jewish nation, and the eagles or vultures are the false Christs and false prophets (of v.24) who would flock together and prey upon the sufferings and fears of their countrymen".

Or, possibly as per Lavertoff: " ... just as when life has abandoned a body, and it becomes a corpse, the vultures immediately swoop down upon it; so when the world has become rotten with evil, the Son of Man and his angels will come to execute divine judgment" – If vs. 29-31 should refer to the *parousia*.

3. Immediately After the Tribulation of Those Days (24:31-41).

That refers obviously to the "tribulation" of vs.21-22 – namely, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state. The darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars from heaven, and the powers of the heavens being shaken, is reminiscent of the figurative language used with reference to the destruction of Babylon centuries earlier, "to Make the land a desolation, and to destroy the sinners thereof," the aftermath of which was predicted as follows: "For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth, and the moon shall not cause its light to shine.... Therefore I will make the heavens to tremble, and the earth shall be shaken out of its place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts, and in the day of his

fierce anger" (Isaiah 13:9-10,13; but read the entire chapter) – which was not the end of time on earth, but only of Babylon.

(Other passages of like nature may be found in Isaiah 34:4 of Edom and Ezekiel 32:7-8 of Egypt, and in Joel 2:31, appealed to by Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:16-20) – none of which referred to the break-up of the universe.)

Yet similar language in Matthew 24:29-31 would not be inappropriate if referring literally to the end of our present "heavens and earth" (not the abode of God and his angels). For the latter is alluded to in 24:35-37 and described in 2 Peter 3:1-13 in connection with (a) the "coming" (*parousia*) of Christ (v.4), and in Revelation 20:11 - 21:1 in connection with (b) the vanishing and dissolution of our physical universe. That occasion will come as a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10), and therefore unawares to those not watching and ready (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6).

That makes for some difficulty in deciding the meaning of Matthew 24:29-31) – whether it pertains to (1) the "coming" (*parousia*) of Christ at the end of the world, or to (2) a figurative ":coming" (*erchomai*), as in Ephesians 2:17, soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, in a great thrust of world-wide evangelism, described as sending his "angels" (messengers) to gather his "elect (by making converts) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other". So we shall take note of the case for each – for (2) first, and then (1). (NOTE: Numbers are used here instead of letters as in the above paragraph, in order to coincide with the numbers given under "Problem", beginning at the bottom of Page 2, hoping thereby to avoid confusion).

(2) The case for a figurative "coming" shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem: (a) The use of the word "immediately" following the destruction of Jerusalem, since the *parousia* at the end of the world has not yet come. (b) The use of the word *erchomai* instead of *Parousia* for the "coming of the Son of man" in this connection, since the latter has not yet occurred. And (a) the statement, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (24:34).

However, with reference to (a), it can be demonstrated that "immediately" is a relative term with reference either to space or time (which will be discussed later). And, in regard to (b), the word *erchomai*, which is a general word for "coming", sometimes refers to the parousia, as it does in Matthew 16:27 for the coming of Jesus to reward every man according to his works, the same as in 25:31. Moreover, 24:34 may be limited to what was to take place before and during the destruction of Jerusalem, and not refer to anything afterward. So, the foregoing arguments are not within themselves conclusive.

(1) The case for 24:29-31 referring to the literal "coming" (*parousia*) of Christ at the end of the world rests upon at least the following:

(a) In a part of the explanation of the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13:38-43, Jesus said: "The field is the world (*kosmos*).... The harvest is the end of the world (*aionos*); and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be at the end of the world (the same expression used in Matthew 24:3,27,37, as the time of his "coming" (*parousia*). In the latter, it is said that at his "coming the Son of man "shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom (in this case, the *kosmos*) all things that cause stumbling,, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire....Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father".

The main difference between 13:41 and 24:31 is that in the former angels gather "them that do iniquity" for destruction whereas in the latter they gather the "elect" for their salvation from the doom of the wicked. And, in this connection, in a passage parallel with Matthew 24:31, Luke 21:28 says "your redemption draweth nigh" – when there are "signs in the sun and moon and stars" and you see Christ coming "with power and great glory" (vs.25-27) – and other "men are fainting for fear" (v.26) – also "that the kingdom of God is nigh" (v.31) – these being a parallel with Matthew 24:29-31, and should be of some value in deciding the meaning of that passage.

Adam Clarke interprets Luke 21:31 as meaning that "after the destruction of the Jewish state, the doctrine of Christ crucified shall be preached every where and every where prevail". And, in his comment on Matthew 24:31, he says of the destruction of Jerusalem, "it was after this period that the kingdom of Christ began, and his reign was established in almost every part of the world".

But that seems to contradict the apostle Paul, who, in the decade prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, said in Colossians 1:13 of the Father that he "delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love"; also, as previously mentioned, "the gospel ... is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing" and "the gospel ... was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister" (1:5-6,23).

It is more likely, therefore, that "your redemption draweth nigh" and "the kingdom of God is nigh" (Luke 21:28,31), refer to (a) the completion of their redemption (including "the redemption of our body" in the resurrection (Romans 8:23) and "salvation to the uttermost" in the world to come (Hebrews 7:25) and to (b) the ushering in of the eternal phase of the kingdom.

In the earthly phase, with Christ reigning as sovereign, we are in a state of probation. When he completes that phase of the kingdom at his second coming and the destruction of the last enemy, death, he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that he may be our all in all as Christ now is, and will himself become subject to the Father though continuing to reign as co-regent (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, cited earlier, also Revelation 22:3). And the apostle Peter speaks of those who, during their probationary state on earth, make their "calling and election sure", as being supplied an "entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11) – for he still reigns, though in a subordinate sense. It is the same kingdom, with two different primary administrations, Christ's, and then the Father's. And the second phase is its perfected state, which Christ delivers to the Father and into which the elect are supplied an entrance. This is evidently what is referred

to by the apostle Paul as "his appearing and his kingdom" in 2 Timothy 4:1, and his saying that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

These considerations seem to reduce the likelihood of the statement in Matthew 24:34 including the events vs.29-31. And it is still further reduced by comparing 24:30-31 with 25:31-32. The first speaks of "the Son of man COMING on the clouds of heaven with POWER AND GREAT GLORY" and "shall send forth his ANGELS" to "GATHER together his elect ... from one end of heaven to the other", and shall likewise "sever the wicked from among the righteous" (13:49). And the second speaks of "when the Son of man shall COME IN HIS GLORY, and ALL THE ANGELS with him", and before him shall be GATHERED all nations", with the righteous ("sheep") and unrighteous ("goats") SEPARATED "one from another".

These passages are so similar that, unless the one word, "immediately", poses an insuperable difficulty, they MUST refer to the SAME GENERAL EVENT – the *parousia* of Christ at the "end of the world". So we shall now give special attention to that word, as promised on page 9 above.

But before we do so it seems in order to mention that Mark 13:24-27 does not use "immediately", but "after" (*meta*), without indicating how long after, and that Luke 21:25-28 does not use either "immediately" or "after", but does mention the same occurrences after stating that "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled" (v.24), without specifying how long afterward.

(b) The expression, "immediately (*eutheos*) after the tribulation of those days" of Jerusalem's destruction, we are now ready to say can hardly be conclusive against the "coming" of the Son of man on the clouds of heaven being his *parousia*, though at first thought it may seem so.

For one thing, there is (a) a possibility that Jesus uses "immediately" in the sense of divine rather than human

perspective, since "one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day", and he "is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness", though the *parousia* is delayed for the salvation of as many as possible (2 Peter 3:8-9).

For another thing, there is (b) a similar problem with the Greek word *tachos* in Luke 18:8, which it may be helpful to consider. That word is translated "shortly" (4 times), corresponding pretty well with "immediately"; "quickly" (1 time); and "speedily" (1 time). The latter rendering is the one in Luke 18:8, where it is used not withstanding delay is indicated in v.7 (the word there being *makrothumeo*, translated as "bear long" – and elsewhere as "be patient", "have patience", "have long patience", "suffer long", "be longsuffering", and "patiently endure"). The Expositor's Greek Testament remarks that *en tachei* in Luke 18:8 is quite compatible with delay, meaning in this instance, "quickly when the hour comes = suddenly".

And (c) *eutheos* in Matthew 24:29 may likewise be used in a relative sense that does not necessarily preclude delay in reference to time. With regard to space, we may see two mountain ranges, one "immediately" beyond the other, between which there may be many miles of space and even other mountains but none of sufficient proportions to be seen in a given perspective. If we apply that to time, two momentous events may be under consideration, with nothing in between to keep one from being mentally seen as immediately after the other. And surely that could have been the situation under consideration by our Lord and his apostles in Matthew 24-25, with 24:29-31 pertaining to the *parousia* – instead of coming between the destruction of Jerusalem and the parousia, as per interpretation (b) mentioned earlier on page 9.

The apostles had asked Jesus, first, when the temple would be destroyed, and second, what would be the sign of his coming, and of the end of the world (24:1-3). They evidently thought, as already indicated, that all would occur at the same time. But in answering them, Jesus made it clear that Jerusalem would be destroyed prior to his *parousia* and the end of the world. Those were the only events under consideration in the apostles' questions,

and the reply of Jesus was to put them in proper perspective in relation to each other.

That perspective alone would be no cause (a) for speaking of anything else between or (b) for not speaking of one as being "immediately" after the other – without necessarily precluding a period of some delay between them – the length of which Christ himself did not then know (v.36). But in 24:48, he speaks of the possibility of a wicked servant saying, "My Lord tarrieth"; and in Chapter 25, in his Parable of the Ten Virgins, the bridegroom "tarried" (v.5), and in his parable of the Talents it was "after a long time" that the Lord returned and made a reckoning with his servants (v.19). And these would seem to be intimations of possibility if not probability of more or less delay.

So, without being dogmatic as to the Lord's actual meaning, it seems safe to say that, on balance, there is more in favor of 24:29-31 referring to the Lord's *parousia* at the end of the world than there is to an unprecedented surge of world evangelism after the destruction of the Jewish state – and this writer is more comfortable with it as an interpretation. So far as he is aware, such a surge is nowhere documented either inside or outside of scripture, though before the end of the 4th century A.D. Christianity had prevailed over paganism in the Roman Empire.

4. Lessons From the Fig Tree: Nearness of Jerusalem's Destruction (24:32-35):

"Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he (margin, Or it) is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away".

a. If we read "he" is nigh (v.33), it would mean Christ. If we read "it" is nigh, it could mean either Christ's coming or Jerusalem's destruction. (In this case, the subject is included in the verb for

"is", and may be read either way, depending on context.) In light of the position already tentatively taken, that the destruction of Jerusalem is meant, "it" is preferable.

When reading vs.29-31, where Christ's coming is referred to, we have the heavens "shaken" and simultaneously "the sign of the Son of man coming" – which sign itself seems to be "the Son of man coming" (just as in Acts 2:38 and 10:45 "the gift of the Holy Spirit" is the Holy Spirit itself as a gift). The word "then" in v.30, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man coming", is *tote*, at that time, not *eita*, afterward, so that there is no interval between. Men will see it and the unprepared will "faint for fear" (Luke 21:26) – Matthew 24:31 says "then (*tote*) shall all the tribes of earth mourn" – for it will then be too late to make preparation for salvation from divine wrath. In other words, the implication is that the coming (*parousia*) of Christ will not be heralded until it is in progress – when he shall "descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Instead, it will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). And once it is under way, there can be no escape by the wicked as there would be for the saints after Jerusalem had been surrounded by armies.

b. "This generation" (v.34) evidently refers to the contemporaries of our Lord, not all of whom would die before Jerusalem's destruction approximately 40 years later. And, only if the events of vs.29-31 should be without any appreciable delay after its destruction, could they also be witnessed by them. But, for reasons already discussed, it is not likely that those events were intended to be included in what some of that generation would live to see.

Some have held, however, beginning with Jerome, that "generation" (*genea*) in this text means race or family, and refers to the Jewish people – that they will not be destroyed when Jerusalem is, but will continue till even the end of the world, the *parousia* of Christ. That they will do so is not questioned by this writer, but he does question that such is the meaning of the text.

For that would be (a) to assign a meaning to *genea* not clearly found elsewhere in the New Testament – though some think they find it in Matthew 12:45 and Luke 16:8. And (b) the context is against it, for Jesus had just previously warned his adversaries that the accumulated guilt of their kind through the ages would be avenged upon "this generation" in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:29-38).

The word *genea* occurs in the Greek New Testament 42 times, translated in the King James Version as "generation" 37 times; twice as "time" (Acts 14:16; 15-21); twice as "age" (Ephesians 3:5,31); and once as "nation" (Philippians 2:15). But in the American Standard Version those passages are likewise rendered "generation".

Three other words are translated "generation" in the King James Version of the New Testament: *genesis*, meaning birth or origin (Matthew 1:1); *gennema*, meaning offspring, and so rendered in the American Standard Version (Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:33; Luke 3:7); and *genos*, meaning race or kind, and translated "race" in the American Standard Version (1 Peter 2:9). The latter would have been more appropriate than *genea* in Matthew 24:34 if "race" in perpetuity had been the sense intended.

W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says of *genea* that, when connected with *ginomai*, which it is not in most if any New Testament texts, it means "to become, primarily signifying a begetting, or birth; then that which has been begotten, a family; or (coming to New Testament usage) successive members of a genealogy (emphasis added), Matthew 1:17, or of a race of people, possessed of similar characteristics, pursuits, etc., (of a bad character) Matthew 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41; 16:8; Acts 2:40; or of the whole multitude of men living at the same time (emphasis added), Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 1:48; 21:32*; Philippians 2:15, and especially of those of the Jewish race living at the same period (emphasis added), Matthew 11:16, etc. Transferred from people to the time in which they lived, the word came to mean an age, i.e., a period ordinarily occupied by each successive generation, say, of thirty or forty years, Acts 14:16;

15:21; Ephesians 3:5; Colossians 1:26; see also e.g., Genesis 15:16". (NOTE: *The above underscored citations are the passage and its parallels with which we are now concerned).

Arndt and Gingrich, in their Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, say of *genea*, that literally it is those descended from a common ancestry (which, of course, could apply to all mankind, because of all having a common ancestry); also, that basically it is "the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time generation, contemporaries". This comports with the underscored portion of the text above from Vine. Also, while saying some advocate the meaning of ":nation" for these passages, Arndt and Gingrich nevertheless employ them in what they call the basic sense of "contemporaries". Thayer also joins with similar definitions, and likewise cites Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, and Luke 21:32 as examples of "the whole multitude of men living at the same time".

But what especially needs to be remembered is that in Matthew 23:36 "this generation" (*genea*) does not have reference to the Jewish people in perpetuity, but to those who were contemporaries of Jesus. For that which was spoken "to the multitudes and to his disciples" (23:1) shortly before leaving the temples provides the context for the same expression spoken to his disciples privately in 24:34 shortly after leaving the temple, making its meaning nearly having to be the same in both instances.

The main subject so far had not been the *parousia* and the end of the world, but the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state, and that was what would be "nigh, even at the doors", when all the signs up to and including the surrounding of Jerusalem by Roman armies had been seen, so that Jesus said, "When ye see all these things, know ye that he (or, it) is nigh, even at the doors", and "This generation (the people living at that time) shall not pass away till all these things (including the destruction of Jerusalem) be accomplished" (vs.33-34). The *parousia* would not be before or during but subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem, as indicated in

vs.29-31. But its time would not be known till it was in progress, as indicated in the latter verses and in the text yet to follow.

c. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (v.35). In our judgment, this is a transitional verse – to impress the certainty of all our Lord was predicting, and likewise to introduce the passing away of heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:1-13; Revelation 20:11 -- 21:11) – "the end of the world (age)" in connection with his "coming (*parousia*)".

5. The Second Coming (*parousia*) of Christ: Remoteness and Lack of Prior Heralding (24:36 – 25:46).

a. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only" (24:36) – so that there is no need to speculate when the *parousia* will be, and those who do are false teachers in at least that respect. But notice now, "that day" of v.36 (of the *parousia*) as distinguished from "these things" of vs.33-34, which had to do with events up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. This means that the *parousia* would be more remote than the destruction of Jerusalem.

And by the time Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians (likely the fall of A.D. 50), he knew the *parousia* would not be before a considerable apostasy would occur, which at that time was being restrained and would be brought to nought by the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus (2:1-12). And Peter later wrote (probably between A.D. 65 and 67) that however long the delay of the *parousia*, it would be because of the "longsuffering" of God – who was "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

b. His coming (*parousia*, v.37) will be as it was in the days of Noah, and they did not know when the flood was coming until it came and took them all away except for Noah and his family, who were prepared (24:37-39).

c. When Christ comes and two are together, one may be taken and another left – evidently when he comes and the righteous are

caught up to meet him in the air (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) – so that preparation needs to be made for it beforehand (24:40-51).

(NOTE: This places the "rapture" of the saints at the end of the world, whereas dispensational premillennialism makes it more than a thousand years prior, at the beginning of a conjectured seven-year tribulation immediately before a fancied coming of Christ to establish the kingdom prophesied and promised in connection with his first coming but could not be inaugurated then because the Jews rejected him and he had to substitute the church as a temporary and interim expedient, as noted above in the introduction).

d. The Parable of Ten Virgins, in which the bridegroom "tarried" and five were not prepared when he came, likewise emphasizes the necessity of staying prepared however long the waiting may be (25:1-13).

e. The Parable of the Talents illustrates the success and failure of different servants while their master was gone "a long time" before returning and having them give account of their stewardship in his absence (25:14-30).

f. The Parable (if it may be called that) of the Sheep and Goats depicts a judgment scene "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him" (25:31-46).

(Aside from its main purpose, this description is quite harmonious with the explanation of the Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:36-43) and the "Little Apocalypse" (Matthew 24:29-31) in regard to the use of angels to gather both the wicked and the elect).

III. ABBREVIATED RUNNING SUMMARY.

1. Chapter 24:1-35 – Related to Destruction of Jerusalem Primarily and Signs Warning of It (except for vs.29-31, which appear to be a brief parenthetical forecast of what happens afterward, and are excluded from what would be accomplished before the then current generation had passed away (vs.32-35)).

2. Chapters 24:36-51 – 25:1-46 – Eschatological Events, Related to the *Parousia*, with no previous signs of warning. (Mark 13:32-37 and Luke 21:34-36 are all these documents devote to the section of Matthew, for it was not a part of their design to give an extended emphasis to the *parousia* as was done in Matthew).