

OPENING PRAYER

Proper 28¹

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written
for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 23:37-39 AND CHAPTER 24²

The Lament over Jerusalem

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you, desolate.[g] 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

24 As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 Then he asked them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

Signs of the End of the Age

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” 4 Jesus answered them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’[a] and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines[b] and earthquakes in various places: 8 all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Persecutions Foretold

9 “Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. 10 Then many will fall away,[c] and they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this good news[d] of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

The Desolating Sacrilege

¹ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.236

² All Bible quotations and footnotes are from Biblegateway.com, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE) Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

15 “So when you see the desolating sacrilege, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; 17 the one on the housetop must not go down to take things from the house; 18 the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. 19 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved, but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’[e] or ‘There he is!’—do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs[f] and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 Take note, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the eagles will gather.

The Coming of the Son of Man

29 “Immediately after the suffering of those days

the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from heaven,
and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

30 “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

32 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he[g] is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

36 “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,[h] but only the Father. 37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day[i] your Lord is coming. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave

45 “Who, then, is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves[j] their allowance of food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. 47 Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ 49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not

expect him and at an hour that he does not know. 51 He will cut him in pieces[k] and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Footnotes

- 23.38 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *desolate*
 24.5 Or *the Christ*
 24.7 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *and pestilences*
 24.10 Or *stumble*
 24.14 Or *gospel*
 24.23 Or *the Christ*
 24.24 Or *christs*
 24.33 Or *it*
 24.36 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *nor the Son*
 24.42 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *at what hour*
 24.45 Gk *to give them*
 24.51 Or *cut him off*

GOSPEL COMPARISON³

Pericope	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem		23:37-39	13:34-35	
Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple	13:1-2	24:1-2	21:5-6	
Signs before the End	13:3-8	24:3-8	21:7-11	
Persecutions Foretold	13:9-13	24:9-14 10:17-22a	21:12-19 12:11-12	
The Desolating Sacrilege	13:14-20	24:15-22	21:20-24	
False Christs and False Prophets	13:21-23	24:23-28	17:23-24 17:37b	
The Coming of the Son of Man	13:24-27	24:29-31	21:25-28	
The Time of the Coming. The Parable of the Fig Tree	13:28-32	24:32-36	21:29-33	
The Parable of the Flood and Exhortation to Watchfulness	13:35	24:37-44	17:26-36 12:39-40	
The Parable of the Good Servant and the Wicked Servant		24:45-51	12:41-46	

³ Source: <http://www.gospelparallels.com/>

PERSPECTIVES

Note – macro view of chapter:

- Jerusalem kills prophets and will be left desolate (23:37-39)
- The Temple will be destroyed (24:2)
- My disciples and followers will be persecuted (24:9)
- The leadership and the people will all be judged (23:38)
- When you see certain signs, flee for safety, do not fight or resist (24:15-18)
- The Son of Man will come to judge (24:34)
- Stay prepared and awake (24:44)

The Olivet Discourse 24:1-25:46

The last of Jesus' 5 major discourses in Matthew is largely concerned with judgement and the conduct expected of the follower of Jesus. There is a problem with whether the word judgement refers to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, or the judgement coming at the end of the age.⁴

Chapter 24 is not a detailed blueprint of the end time scenario. Matthew is interested in presenting: 1) supplying the true ending of the Messiah's story so that the whole can be grasped; 2) in foretelling and therefore making bearable Christian suffering; 3) in nurturing hope to showing how a good future can issue from an evil present; and 4) in encouraging the battle against moral languor.⁵

In Matthew, eschatology does not simply console, it demands the discernment and adherence to Jesus' commands. The eschatological imagination does not replace practical moral concern.⁶

Five different views of Chapter 24⁷:

1. Fulfilled prophecy vv. 3-32 and 35 have to do with events surrounding the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE, and vv. 36-44 with the Parousia, within Jesus return, whose precise date is known;
2. Purely eschatological, "immediately" in v. 29, for as Matthew wrote much after 70 CE he could not have thought the Parousia would follow immediately after the fall of the Temple, which in turn would make vv.15-22 unlikely that they depict the temple's destruction;
3. An option that views the text referring to both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Parousia and holds them in close chronological sequence (which would date Matthew's writing around 70 CE);
4. An approach that thinks of both 70 CE and the end at the same time. It is now a chronological sequence but a single prophecy with two fulfillments.
5. Allison's view: vv. 4-28 are a depiction of the post-Easter period, interpreted in terms of messianic woes. The discourse concerns the past, the present and the future. What happened will continue to happen and indeed worsen. Whether the events of 70 CE are directly or indirectly referenced remains unclear.

Allison's answer to the disciples two-part question is that the temple will be destroyed during the tribulation to come. Which runs from the first advent to the second; and after that tribulation (*squeeze* in Greek) the end, whose date cannot be known, will come.⁸

Chapter 24 also interprets the interim between the two advents as the time of messianic woes, when Jesus is absent. But 28:16-20⁹ recalls this discourse in that it features a mountain, refers to the "end of

⁴ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel according to Matthew* pp.593-618

⁵ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary*, pp. 876-878

⁶ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary*, pp. 876-878

⁷ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary*, pp. 876-878

⁸ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary*, pp. 876-878

⁹ Matthew: 28:16-20 16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

the age”, alludes to Daniel 7:13, proclaims the Gentile mission and uses identical language as 28:20. This depicts the age of the church as one of Jesus consoling and all-powerful presence. Jesus is even now the present Lord who rules over heaven and earth. But he is also the absent master who delay permits evil to inflict tribulation.¹⁰

24:1-2 The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

v.1 Matthew has Jesus leave the temple for the last time, he is effectively abandoning it. v. 2 Jesus makes clear that while the temple is a beautiful building, the disciples should not be beguiled by it. What matters is that God’s people should live Godly lives – when they do not, disaster in some form ensues.¹¹

Note: The three Synoptic Gospels all agree on the fate of the Temple and may reflect a post-70 CE awareness of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans according to modern scholars.

Mark 13:2	Matthew 24:2	Luke 21:6
2 Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. ”	2 Then he asked them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. ”	6 “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down. ”

v. 2 prophesizes the destruction of the temple (26:61¹²; 27:40¹³). The declaration does not question the legitimacy of the cult. It is a tragic forecast of disaster fostered by human sin – God’s verdict upon the capital of Israel.¹⁴

v.2 “*All will be thrown down*” places the writing of the Gospel after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE by the Romans. Later Jesus will be accused of threatening to destroy the Temple. (26:60-61)¹⁵

24:3-8 Signs of the End of the Age

24:3-8 Mount of Olives is located east, across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. It is the traditional place where Ezekiel prophesized that the God-departure from the Temple would go; and where the Messiah was expected to appear.¹⁶

v. 3 Jesus is now seated across the valley from the temple on the Mount of Olives. This is the traditional posture of a teacher/rabbi and his students/disciples. The following discussion is done in private between Jesus and the disciples. The disciples ask two questions: the time when the temple would be destroyed and when Jesus would return. The disciples may have thought the two events were closely linked. The form of their question implies that Jesus had spoken more extensively on eschatology than this passage reflects.¹⁷ V.3 Has two embedded questions: “*This*”, the destruction is separate from, “*the sign*” of Jesus coming for the final judgement.¹⁸

Vv:4-5 Jesus opens with the disciples avoiding being led astray. They will encounter people who claim to be the messiah after Jesus has died. Jesus tells the disciples that *many* will come *in his name*. They will be claiming Jesus’ title of Messiah, but they are not the messiah. They will deceive many.¹⁹

the Holy Spirit 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”[a]

Footnotes

28.20 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *Amen*

¹⁰ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

¹¹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

¹² Matthew 26:61 “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”

¹³ Matthew 27:40 “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

¹⁴ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

¹⁵ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

¹⁶ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

¹⁷ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

¹⁸ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

¹⁹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

v. 4-5 Matthew and history records several false prophets and messianic deceivers in 1st Century CE Israel.²⁰ V. 5 Josephus reports several “*false Messiahs*” appeared in Israel between the late 30-60 CE.²¹

v.6 The *wars and rumors of wars*, will be difficult days, but Jesus’ followers will not be caught up in these conflicts – they *hear* of them. Jesus is telling his followers two things: do not get caught up in the conflicts; and do not get gripped by panic. The know that these events are under God’s control, necessary, and fit into God’s plan.²²

v. 8 “*All these things*” is the totality of the turmoil and troubles means the beginning of the process that will usher in the final state of affairs, they are “*the beginning of the birth pangs*”.²³

24:9-14 Persecutions Foretold

Matthew increases the references to false prophets leading people astray (24:11, 24). The prediction of the desolating sacrilege is localized to the Temple in Jerusalem and is more applicable to the Roman destruction of the Temple and City in 70 CE.²⁴ The prediction is that the city will be emptied after the sacrilege occurs²⁵.

v. 9 addresses the actions of the authorities against the disciples. They will take the initiative against Jesus’ followers, who will suffer more than regular people are suffering during the difficult times. That “*they will kill you*” does not mean that all Christians will be killed. But some certainly will. Jesus’ followers will be hated on account of Jesus’ name, because they bear the name “Christian”.²⁶

v.9 “*All nations*”, persecution from outside the Israelite nation are foreseen – possibly as a result of the mission to the Gentiles.²⁷

v. 10 is unique to Matthew and may refer to the decline of social relationships during the siege of Jerusalem. v. 11-12 Many false prophets will appear, and many people will be deceived. In that situation lawlessness will prevail. v.13 Saving faith is known not by some firm declaration or a well-intentioned beginning, but by endurance under pressure. Those who endure to the end will be saved.²⁸

v. 14 For the third and last time in Matthew, the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed. At first Jesus proclaimed this gospel (4:23; 9:35), but now it is a task for his followers. Gospel is good news, the good news that God has established his kingdom through what his Son Jesus has done for sinners is a message that must be taken to the ends of the earth.²⁹ The emphasis in chapter 28 is on teaching as ministry.³⁰

The essence of the Gospel is what God has done for the world through the life of his Son, Christ. Christian salvation calls for endurance, but at the end of the day the outcome is driven by what God is doing in Christ. The death of Christ is to be an atoning death, a death in which he would deal with the problems of human sin and be a “ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). The proclamation of the gospel is bearing testimony to that fact. And this testimony is to be made before all nations. Christianity must always be a missionary faith.³¹

²⁰ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

²¹ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

²² Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

²³ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

²⁴ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 198-9

²⁵ Discussion with Eugene E. Lemcio (Лемцьо), Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University, 3/14/23

²⁶ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

²⁷ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

²⁸ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

²⁹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

³⁰ Discussion with Eugene E. Lemcio (Лемцьо), Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University, 3/14/23

³¹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

24:14 “*This good news of the kingdom*”, Jesus teachings and deeds, and perhaps also the Matthean Gospel. “*All nations*”, the mission to both Israel and all Gentiles will continue until the end of time.³²

24:15-28 The Desolating Sacrilege

Note: Matthew enhances the prophecy in Mark by referencing Daniel. Luke goes on to describe the historic Roman army attack on Jerusalem and the outcome of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

Mark 13:14-20	Matthew 24:15-21	Luke 21:20-24
14 “But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; 15 the one on the housetop must not go down or enter to take anything from the house; 16 the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat.	15 “So when you see the desolating sacrilege, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; 17 the one on the housetop must not go down to take things from the house; 18 the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat.	20 “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it, 22 for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written.
17 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! 18 Pray that it may not be in winter. 19 For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved, but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days.	19 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved, but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23	23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; 24 they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations, until the times of the nations are fulfilled.

The climax of the woes: the abomination which marks the time for flight (vv. 21-2); the short-lived tribulation (vv. 21-22); and the false Christs and prophets (vv. 23-28).³³

vv. 15 the “desolating sacrilege” is from Daniel. Matthew may be referring to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE; or some future eschatological defilement and destruction. In any case, the defilement sets off catastrophic events which one should flee.³⁴

v.15 “*Desolating sacrilege*”, (Dan 9:27, 22:31, 12:11) where is referred in Daniel to an offensive altar to the Zeus set up in the Jerusalem temple by the Seleucid King Antiochus IV in 167 BCE. Matthew adds “*spoken of by the prophet Daniel*” and changes the Markan language to “*standing in the holy place*”. The saying might have referred to the Roman Emperor Caligula’s unfulfilled plan to set up his own statute in the Jerusalem Temple in 40 CE, or to the presence of the Roman army and general in the Temple in 70 CE. “*Let the reader understand*” is an interruption from Mark 13:14, that signaled the importance of the mysterious symbol to the writer and the reader, who in antiquity normally read aloud to an assembly and later a church.³⁵

v.15 Jesus gives no indication of the exact time when what he speaks of will take place. The desolating sacrilege is from Daniel and occurs repeatedly with some variation in Matthew (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). In Daniel it refers to Antiochus Epiphanes who built an altar to Zeus and sacrificed swine in the Temple. Here it may also refer to the Romans who brought their standards and destroyed the lands in the war in 66-70 CE. It could also refer to the actions of Jewish defenders of the temple during the siege.³⁶

³² Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

³³ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

³⁴ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

³⁵ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

³⁶ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

V.16 A tradition claims that Christians in Jerusalem obeyed an oracle to flee to Pella when the Roman army threatened the city.³⁷

vv. 16-18 When the people see the delating sacrilege they are to flee, make for the mountains. The urgency of flight – because there will be no time to prepare, or delay. Flight because otherwise they will perish. Wherever the followers are, rooftop or field, flee without delay. vv. 19-21 Jesus pronounces a woe on women who are pregnant or with babies at their breasts. It will be more difficult for them to make a speedy escape. Flight in winter or on the sabbath will be more difficult – but people should still flee. Even if the emergency comes on the Sabbath, followers should flee regardless of Torah rules forbidding travel on the Sabbath.³⁸

vv. 22 The “*elect*” seems to take us beyond Judaism and again “*all flesh*” surely means more than Judaism. vv. 23-27 There may be an interval between the first and second event – the Temple’s destruction and the second coming/judgment. In that interim there will be false prophets and messiahs, and followers of Jesus are not to give credence to their claims. The fundamental article of faith in Jesus is that he is the only Messiah. The coming of the Messiah will not a secret thing. It will not require secret knowledge. Jesus likens his coming to *lightening*. Everyone will see and hear the coming.³⁹

24:22 “*The elect*” God’s chosen, righteous people.⁴⁰

vv. 24-5 makes three points: 1) Jesus himself has made it plain that signs and wonders are not of themselves guarantees of God’s activity and incredulity has its place; 2) tribulation can be no surprise for it has been predicted and so it must be endured; and 3) unlike false prophets, Jesus’ prophecy is true.⁴¹

v. 28 ends the review of the tribulation (Job 9:26) and it may mean that the coming of the Son of Man will be as public and obvious as eagles or vultures circling over carrion.⁴²

24:29-31 The Coming of the Son of Man

Vv. 29-51 deal with two themes: the coming of the Son of Man and the follower’s conduct in view of the certainty of that coming. Additionally, Jesus makes clear that no one, except God, knows when all of this will occur. Using apocalyptic language of the prophets (Isaiah 13:19-22; 34:4; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 12:10-14) which can be frightening, Jesus reminds his followers that God is working through these events, and this should encourage the people and not make them afraid.⁴³

The eschatological flight will be halted by the arrival of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days (vv. 29). The traditional language of the OT theophany is that Jesus’ coming is the arrival of God’s glory. Our eyes are lifted from the earth to the sky and then to heaven. The supernatural darkness, v. 29, is richly symbolic and on a literary level it foreshadows the darkness at Jesus’ death.⁴⁴

V.29 Jesus says that the sky will darken and there will be no light from the sun, stars, or moon. v.30 “*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven*”. It is not clear what is meant by *sign*. Whatever it is the sign will appear in the sky and a trumpet will sound – and Jesus will appear for judgement. Jesus is speaking of a majestic appearance of a King, the very antithesis of his first coming. v. 31 The majestic appearance of the King will spell deliverance for the servants of God. The angels will appear to gather the elect. Not one of them will be overlooked.⁴⁵

³⁷ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

³⁸ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

³⁹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁴⁰ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

⁴¹ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴² Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴³ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁴⁴ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴⁵ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

vv. 30-31 are the dramatic zenith of chapter 24. The coming of the Son of Man is a universally witnessed event. “the sign of the Son of Man” might be a sign of the Son of Man himself, or his actual coming. It could mean that the Son of Man will signal the eschatological battle by raising an eschatological sign. In Israel a ram’s horn is blown to rally troops for battle and an ensign raised on a hilltop.⁴⁶

24:32-35 The Lesson of the Fig Tree

v.34 The reference to “*generation*” is problematic because Matthew is likely writing after Jesus generation from the 30s CE have died and the prophecy is unfulfilled. The early Christian movement believed that the Parousia would occur before all of the disciples had died.⁴⁷

All five of Matthew’s discourses end on an eschatological note. The meaning of Matthew’s story is determined not only by its literary ending but by the ending of history itself: if history’s conclusion is not Christological, then Christology itself becomes a question.⁴⁸

v.32 Jesus turns to the appropriate conduct of his followers. They are commanded to pay attention and be prepared for the coming. “*Truly I tell you*” introduces an important statement. Unfortunately the meaning and importance is unclear. “*This generation*” that will not “*pass away*” means on the face of it that Jesus expects to return in glory during the life times of the disciples to whom he is speaking. Is it tied to the resurrection? The destruction of the temple? When is the day of judgement to occur? Is it that all of the events of 24:2-28 are to have occurred first? And does it mean Jesus will return immediately afterwards or sometime later?⁴⁹

24:36-44 The Necessity for Watchfulness

Chapter 24 is intended to quell uninformed eschatological enthusiasm, but not to replace it with apathy. 24:36-44 seeks to foster eschatological vigilance. Ignorance of the date of the end leads to moral preparation. For the Parousia like death can come at any time.⁵⁰ Matthew emphasizes watchfulness (24:37-51) because there is no precise knowable timetable, and no one can know when the Son of Man is coming.⁵¹

Jesus then says that no one but the Father knows when these things will happen. So there is no answer to the disciples questions: when will the temple be destroyed and when will Jesus return. Jesus does not know. People should draw on the experience of Noah as they follow Jesus after his death and resurrection but before these coming events. Noah stayed faithful to God, suffered criticism from his neighbors, and when the flood came it came swiftly with no warning. People will be doing their normal business right up to the end. And then the end will occur.⁵²

24:45-51 The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave

Unique to Matthew.

Vv 45-51 may be especially focused on early church and community leaders. The reading has been popular in the church since its very early days.⁵³ Unfaithful church leaders, like the servant who is not awake and ready when the master returns, will be treated as badly as the hypocrites. (24:51).⁵⁴

The faithful and sensible slave is responsible while his master is away, and he will fulfill his duties while his master is away. This slave does what he should, not knowing when his master will return. He strives so that whenever the master returns things will be in order.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴⁷ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴⁸ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁴⁹ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁵⁰ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁵¹ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 198-9

⁵² Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁵³ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 876-878

⁵⁴ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 198-9

⁵⁵ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

The unjust slave begins to act unjustly taking advantage of his position over others. He is doing this because he thinks the situation will continue indefinitely. He has not reckoned with the fact that his master could and will return with no notice and he will be held to account for his actions. Jesus is emphasizing that delay does not mean cancellation – the master is returning and when he does the unjust slave will be cut in two for his actions.⁵⁶

Schweizer wrote that “Chapter 23 pronounces judgement on the Pharisaic Judaism in harsh oppressive terms; Chapter 24 pronounces judgement in equally harsh terms on the community of Jesus.” Jesus uses the same high standard for both groups. Service must be wholehearted and that in due course they will have to give an account of themselves to one from whom nothing remains hidden.⁵⁷

An allegorically interpreted slave parable warns about a delay in Jesus’ return.⁵⁸

REFLECTION

How do we interpret this chapter? Is it an eschatological judgement on the people and institutions that kill prophets, and good news for followers of Jesus who stay faithful and awake?

What is Matthew’s message to the church about how to handle waiting for the second coming?

When will the end occur

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. (v. 34)

Are we confronted with the dilemma of *Kairos*, “the appointed time in the purpose of God,” the time when God acts as in Mark 1:15: “the kairos is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand”, and *chronos*, meaning human measurable time?

Perseverance in Faith

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (v.13)

Watchfulness

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (v.44)

⁵⁶ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁵⁷ Morris, Leon, The Gospel according to Matthew pp.593-618

⁵⁸ Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV Version, pp. 1709-1712

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the witness of your apostle and evangelist,
Matthew, to the Gospel of Beatitude and Grace
which you have given us in your Son, our Savior;
and we pray that, after his example,
we may with ready wills and hearts obey
the calling of our Lord to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

SLOW RELIGION: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



The Inspiration of St. Matthew, Caravaggio, 1602

Slow Religion, The Gospel According to Matthew is a lay person-led adult education weekly class for Christians and seekers. Slow Religion uses a literary and historical approach to the ancient texts to identify and apply insights from the Gospel to today's world.

Matthew's gospel is worth studying because the author attempts to uphold Jesus' Jewish past, with Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection, in the context of the 1st Century CE Jesus movement and early church, and in a hostile Hellenistic and Jewish world.

21st Century readers recognize Matthew as the source of many of the best-known stories and sayings of Jesus as well as a social philosophy that many non-Christians believe in. Famous for its Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, and other teachings, Matthew is often called the most Jewish of the Gospels, while also contributing with the Gospel of John to antisemitism.

The class is created and led by Joe Jennings and advisors include: the Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA; the Rev. Br. Richard Edward Helmer, Episcopal Church of our Saviour, Mill Valley, CA; the Rev. Heather Wenrick, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Seattle; and the Father Vincent Pizzuto, PhD., vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Inverness CA and Full Professor at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, New Testament and Christian Mysticism, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

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