

(2) Matthew 24.1-14

The **Chronology** of the *Discourse*

The sermon broadly divides into *three* parts. 24.1-44 is the **Jewish** portion, viewing the disciples as representatives of the faithful remnant in the end times (tribulation). This culminates with the coming of the Son of man in ‘power and great glory’ (24.30). The *last* section (25.31-46) deals with the judgment of **Gentile** nations and their attitude towards the remnant. The *central* section (24.45-25.30) deals with the responsibility of professing servants of the Lord between his ascension and second advent (cf. 25.14). There is a marked change in language from *Son of man* (particularly linked with Israel and judgment) to *Lord* and *Bridegroom*. The opening portion of the discourse can be divided as follows:

Timeline of the Olivet Discourse			
The Seven Year Tribulation Period			The Second Coming
24.4-14	24.15-20	24.21-28	24.29-31
The Beginning of Birth Pangs	The Abomination of Desolation	The Great Tribulation	The Return of Christ
<i>First 3.5 years of the tribulation</i>	<i>Middle of the tribulation</i>	<i>Last 3.5 years of the tribulation</i>	<i>After the tribulation</i>

Adapted from Mark Hitchcock, “The End”

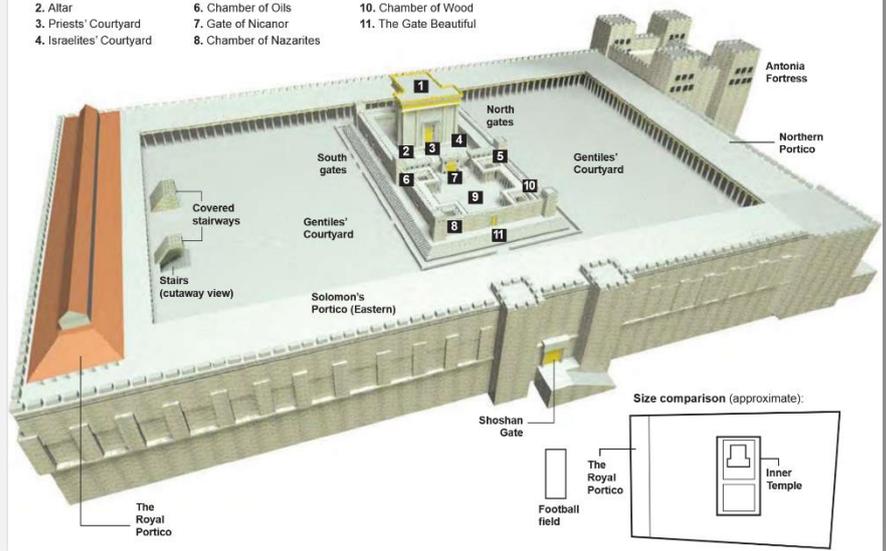
Departing the Temple [Matt. 24.1-3]

v.1: The symbolic significance of the Lord’s departure from the temple was considered in detail in the Introduction (1). Once again, the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ was departing the temple, shortly to cross the Kidron Valley and ascend the mount of Olives (cf. Ezekiel 10.18-19; 11.22-23). This is a similar symbolic action to leaving ‘the house’ and sitting by the ‘seaside’ (13.1) – God’s purpose will embrace Gentiles, as well as the temporary setting-aside (desolation) of the nation of Israel. The disciples, as all Jews, were proud of the temple. It was a monument to the power and blessing of God amongst His people. Hence the disciples came to ‘shew’ Christ the buildings of the temple. For a moment, and clearly having misunderstood the significance of the pronounced ‘woes’ and actions of the Lord in the preceding chapter, they had become occupied with the architectural beauty of the physical and material – the *shadows* rather than the *substance*. The temple complex was indeed magnificent. The four walls stretched 1588m (4985ft), nearly a mile in length, and encompassed an area of 14.6ha – the same as 21 average sized football pitches. King Herod began renovations on the temple in 20-19BC which were not completed until AD62-64, just years before the Romans destroyed (AD70). The walls varied in height from 40-48m and were 4.5m wide. The walls and foundations were constructed with local Jerusalem limestone, each stone being expertly quarried to fit perfectly against one another. The buildings themselves comprised gleaming white marble. Some archaeologists (e.g. Leen Ritmeyer, the former architect of the archaeological excavations below the Temple Mount) suggest that the entire eastern façade of the temple building was covered in gold plate that reflected the morning sun making a spectacle that was visible for miles. **v.2:** Given the magnificence of such a structure, the words of Christ must have shocked the disciples (although note Zechariah 14.1-2). Not ‘one stone’ would be left ‘upon another’! This was literally fulfilled in AD70 when the Romans built large wooden scaffolds around the walls of the temple buildings and set them ablaze. The heat from the fire was so intense that the gold became molten and

Herod’s Temple on the Temple Mount

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Temple in approximately 20–19 BC. The entire temple expansion, including the massive Temple Mount, was not complete until approximately AD 62–64, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

1. Holy Place
2. Altar
3. Priests’ Courtyard
4. Israelites’ Courtyard
5. Chamber of Lepers
6. Chamber of Oils
7. Gate of Nicanor
8. Chamber of Nazarites
9. Womens’ Courtyard
10. Chamber of Wood
11. The Gate Beautiful



ran down between the crumbled stones. The Romans “systematically removed everything, stone by stone, in order to get to the gold that had solidified inside the crevices” (Fruchtenbaum). **v.3:** The disciples must have been deep in thought (and discussion) as the company walked to the mount of Olives where the Lord Jesus sat down. From the place of His *rejection* (temple), the Lord had moved to the place of His glorious *return* and *triumph* (Zechariah 14.4). The disciples (Peter, James, John and Andrew, cf. Mark 13.3) came ‘privately’ to ask the Lord concerning these things. The disciples asked **two** clear questions, the second being presented in *two* parts) based upon a sound chronology of future events no doubt built from Zechariah 14.1-11. **First**, ‘when shall these things be’, clearly referring to the timing of the temple’s destruction (AD70). Whilst the Lord Jesus uses several time-markers throughout the discourse (vv.6, 8, 9, 10 etc.) the specific details of AD70 are only recorded in Luke 19.20-24. **Second**, ‘what shall be the sign of thy coming’ (*parousia*) and the ‘end of the age’ (not ‘world’). The Greek construction (with two nouns governed by one article) makes it clear this is *one* question in *two* parts. The events are *synchronous* as the coming of Christ **is** the end of the age. The word *parousia* is used 24 times in the NT. The word comes from *para* (with) and *ousia* (being, from *eimi*, to be). It signifies the *arrival* and *consequent* continuing presence of one who has been absent. It was used as an official term for the visit of a person of high rank. The NT references reveal three aspects of the Parousia. **1. Rapture** (commencement), 1 Thessalonians 4.15. **2. Reception** (continuance), 1 Thessalonians 2.19; 3.13. **3. Revelation** (consummation), 2 Thessalonians 2.8. Clearly, the revelation of Christ is the subject of the disciples’ question (the *rapture* was truth as yet unrevealed). The disciples sought to know what signs would attend the glorious arrival and permanent presence of Christ as Messiah and King. The ‘end (completion) of the age’ is referred to four times by the Lord Jesus in Matthew (13.39, 40, 49; 28.20). It is a period of time that will consummate in the final judgment (on earth) at the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. “*In rabbinic theology of that day, the rabbis spoke of two ages: this age, in which we now live; and the age to come, the Messianic Age. The question is: “What is the sign that the last days of this age have begun and that will lead to the Messianic Age?”* (Fruchtenbaum).

Deception and Devastation of the *Beginning of Sorrows* [vv.4-8]

v.4: The section from vv.4-14 describes general conditions primarily during the first half of the tribulation, or “beginning of sorrows” (v.8). This is supported by a remarkable parallel with the six seals of Revelation 6 (see table below). Whilst some of these signs are evident today, they will reach a special intensity during the tribulation. For example, inflation will be astronomical, a person’s daily food (bread) supplies costing the equivalent of a day’s wages (Revelation 6.6).

Matthew 24		Revelation 6	
v.5	False Christs	First Seal (v.2)	Rider on a <i>white</i> horse conquering by creating a deceitful false peace
vv.6-7	Wars and rumours of wars Nation shall rise against nation	Second Seal (vv.3-4)	Rider on a <i>red</i> horse taking peace from the earth
v.7	Famines	Third Seal (vv.5-6)	Rider on a <i>black</i> horse with a pair of balances in his hand – famine
v.7	Pestilence (plagues) Earthquakes	Fourth Seal (vv.7-8)	Rider called death on a <i>pale</i> (green) horse – using warfare, famine and wild beasts. Having authority over 25% of the earth
vv.9-10	Persecution	Fifth Seal (vv.9-11)	The souls of those violently slain because of their testimony to the word of God
v.7 v.29	Earthquakes Signs in sun, moon and stars	Sixth Seal (vv.12-17)	Huge earthquake with signs in sun, moon and stars

Note. The signs which begin under the sixth seal continue and intensify under the seventh trumpet. The full climax comes in the seventh bowl just before the Lord Himself appears.

“Take heed” simply means to *watch carefully*, calling for vigilance in a period of great spiritual deception from false *Christs* and false *prophets* (cf. vv.5, 11, 24). This deception will reach its apex in the miracles of **the** false prophet (Revelation 13.14; 19.20). This warning may have been prompted by the eagerness of the disciples to look for signs. Toussaint: “*The razing of the temple and the presence of wars and rumours of wars do not necessarily signify the nearness of the end.*” Such eagerness for signs raises the danger of being misled. **v.5:** Deception will come in the form of a whole host of individuals claiming to be Christ. They do not merely claim to be representatives of Christ, but actually the Messiah himself, coming “in his name” as if they *were* he. Sadly, the rejection of the true Christ will open the nation to the reception of a false Christ (John 5.43). Demonic power may enable these claimants to manifest supernatural powers. The parallel first seal of Revelation 6.2 presents the Antichrist as one who rides forth to conquer through the establishment of false peace. Believers today are warned, not against false *Christs*, but false *teachers* (2 Peter 2.1) and false *spirits* (1 John 4.1) as this age is distinguished by the residence of the Spirit. The disciples, as representatives of a faithful Jewish remnant, are being warned of what will befall their nation in the tribulation – hence false Christs. Sadly,

many will be deceived. **v.6:** At this time, there will be constant talk about “wars” and “rumours of wars” (hostilities). The false peace established in Palestine during the first half of the tribulation may well be brutally disturbed by a militant Islamic and Russian confederacy from the north (cf. Ezekiel 38-39; Daniel 11.40-45). The remnant must not be “troubled” (lit. scared stiff, to cry aloud). These things must come to pass in the purpose of God, but the “end” (of the age) and manifestation of Christ, is not yet. **v.7:** “For” operates to explain why there are so many “wars” and “rumours of wars”. Nations (*ethnos*, people) will rise up “upon”, and come down on, other nations. The phrase is a Jewish idiom pointing to total conflict within a particular area. Given the context is global (vv.14, 21, 30) the suggestion is of worldwide conflict. No group of people will be exempt from conflict or rumour of the same. These conflicts may well be racial, ethnic and cultural as well as national. The word “kingdom” (*basileia*) describes a territory ruled by a king and could suggest *groups* of nations (or *empires*) fighting against one another. A logical outcome of war is famine as illustrated by the rider on a *black* horse (Revelation 6.5-6). He rides with a pair of scales in his hand, illustrating the soaring prices of daily necessities such as bread. Again, “pestilence” (plagues) are a natural outcome of such depravity leading to widespread death (indicated in the pale green colour of the horseman – the colour of death, Rev. 6.7-8). There will also be great and widespread “earthquakes” (cf. Luke 21.11) – seemingly a prominent feature of the tribulation (cf. Ezekiel 38.19-20; Revelation 6.12; 11.13; 16.18). **v.8:** All these things are the “beginning of sorrows”, or “birth pangs”, i.e. the events of the first half of the tribulation. Just as labour pains naturally intensify toward delivery, so the pain and sorrow of the tribulation will increase into Great Tribulation, eventually giving birth to the glorious messianic age. Even the whole creation “groaneth and travaileth in pain” until the Lord comes (Romans 8.18-23).

Description of True [v.9] and False [vv.10-13] Disciples

v.9: “Then” does not necessarily imply that which *follows* in time, but at the *same* general time, i.e. violent persecution is simultaneous to the events of vv.4-8, thus characterising the “birth pangs” and beyond. “You” refers to a faithful element of the nation, a remnant who give true witness to the word of God after the rapture of the church (Revelation 6.9-11). The persecution is further developed in Matthew 10.16-23, a passage which speaks of a parallel time. “They” refers to those described in v.10, i.e. traitors from the ranks of many professed followers of Jesus the Messiah. There will be betrayal and hostility from the professed believing community themselves. Many will turn to Gentile believers for help in such difficult days (cf. 25.31-46). Thus, a faithful remnant will be “delivered up” – a technical word for arrest or handing over a prisoner for punishment. They will be “afflicted”, suffering crushing pressure (*thlipsis*) to the point of bursting – some being violently slain (Revelation 6.9). That a faithful remnant of Jews is in view is confirmed by the “hatred of all **nations**” (rather than “all **men**” as would be the case if the *church* was in view), somewhat ironic as they are witnesses of the gospel to “all nations” (v.14). The persecution is due to their association with the name of Christ. As men cannot persecute the Lord himself, they will instead pursue those identified with him (Acts 5.41).

v.10: The next few verses (vv.10-13) describe the general spiritual state of the Jewish nation in tribulation days. Though many will profess discipleship of Jesus as Messiah (outward allegiance), the severe persecution of the day will cause them to forsake Christ and join unbelievers in oppressing God’s people. There are three simple reasons for their apostasy: **1.** The cost will be too high (v.10, cf. 13.20-21). **2.** The deception will be too convincing (v.11). **3.** Sin will be too attractive (v.12). The Greek word translated “offended” describes a trap used to ensnare animals. In this context it describes those who are *caught* in sin and wilfully *fall away* from (abandon) the faith (truth), proving they were never saved. They deny Christ and refuse to suffer for his sake. This is the kind of moral and spiritual apostasy described in 2 Thessalonians 2.3 and 2 Timothy 3.1-5. They are not genuine believers who, in a moment of weakness fall into denial (like **Peter**), but weak and cowardly professors of faith who, for material gain or self-interest (avoiding persecution) viciously betray the saints (like **Judas**). These individuals will declare their true character by “betraying” the saints, including those of their own family (Mark 13.12; Luke 21.16), to the authorities degenerating professed love into hatred. **v.11:** There will be an abundance of false *prophets* (to be distinguished from false *teachers*, 2 Peter 2.1), not dissimilar to the great apostasy of the reign of Ahab (2 Chronicles 18.18-22). They will seek to lead men away from the true God and after themselves – quite possibly offering easier alternatives to the narrow way of true discipleship, Matthew 7.15-16. These false prophets will ultimately be cleansed from the land at the return of Christ (Zechariah 13.2-6). **v.12:** “Iniquity” or *lawlessness* will abound because evil will no longer be restrained (2 Thessalonians 2.6-7). There will be no recognition of divine truth, and even a disregard for human laws resulting in complete anarchy (2 Timothy 3.1-5). In such an atmosphere, the “love of many” for God, His word and one’s neighbour shall grow (blow) “cold”. *Lawlessness* extinguishes *love* – for it is motivated by personal, selfish concerns. **v.13:** But, there is a glimmer of hope. The genuine will “endure” (persevere) to the end – despite the cost, pain, sorrow and suffering. Genuine faith may, at times, lapse into sin and failure – but it always has the quality of permanence. Real believers will continue in the time of distress until the hour of deliverance at the second coming of Christ. The “salvation” in view cannot be spiritual, for perseverance does not secure salvation – that depends on Christ. Rather it speaks of *physical deliverance* from suffering and persecution at the return of Christ. Obviously, many will be martyred for the faith and not remain physically alive unto the end, but their *spiritual* salvation is assured (Revelation 6.9-11; 20.4).

Declaration of the Gospel [v.14]

v.14: Throughout the tribulation “the gospel of the kingdom” will be preached. This is a continuation of the sending out of the *twelve* (Matthew 10) and *seventy* disciples (Luke 10) – the mission being extended worldwide rather than the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”. God will once again use the nation of Israel as his *witnesses* and *representatives* to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42.6; 43.10). It is likely the 144,000 will fulfil the preaching mandate, the results of their ministry being recorded in Revelation 7.9-17 where “a great multitude” of Gentiles are saved. The “gospel of the kingdom” is the same message preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus and his disciples (3.2; 4.17). Its nature and scope is the coming King and his kingdom. Today we preach the “gospel of the grace of God”. This is not *another* gospel but declares a risen and coming **Saviour** and, through faith, provides fitness for **heaven**. The gospel of the kingdom declares a risen and returning **King** and provides fitness for an **earthly kingdom**. In each case, the *inward* change (regeneration) is the same.

The message will be preached in “all the world”. JN Darby: *“The establishment of the universal authority of the ascended Christ should be preached in all the world to test their obedience, and to furnish those who had ears to hear with the object of faith.”* Some believe this preaching will be restricted to the nations comprising the final world empire as the word “world” (*oikoumene*) means ‘inhabited world’. However, the word can be used in a global sense (cf. Acts 17.31) and there is a close parallel with Revelation 14. Around the midpoint of the tribulation there will be a divine *global* proclamation of the gospel as well as a warning to every “nation, kindred, tongue and people” not to worship the beast and his image or receive his mark (read Revelation 14.6-12). It is *after* this, the “end” of the age will come.