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Olivet Discourse (Part 3)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an interpretation of the Olivet Discourse in relation to the events leading up to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. He argues that "this generation" refers to the contemporary audience of Jesus' time and notes that the phrase "Son of Man coming" should be viewed in context rather than always referring to the second coming. Gregg suggests that the disciples may not have been referring to the second coming when they asked about "the sign of [Christ's] coming," and examines interpretations of the phrase "coming in the clouds" in various passages.

Transcript

Okay, this is our second lecture on the subject of the Tribulation, and in our discussion yesterday, we were looking at the Olivet Discourse. I gave you some handouts about that, and I've given you out another one today. The handouts that I gave out yesterday, one of them simply contained a summation of the chapters from the works of Josephus that describe what happened in 70 AD.

Those of you who have read it will realize that it's like reading a horror story. The other handout I gave you shows in four columns the material from three Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, that are related to the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24 is very possibly the best known to the average person.

Mark 13 parallels it, and Luke parallels it in two different places, in Luke 21 and in Luke 17. Now, what I would like to suggest to you is that Matthew 24, which is the easiest one to work through in some respects, is a compressed sermon that Matthew has taken two different discourses of Jesus, one of which is recorded in Luke 17, and the other is recorded in Luke 21. And from these two discourses, Matthew has combined them and made one.

Now, the problem here is that one of those discourses in Luke, namely the one in Luke 21, would appear to be entirely about what happened when the temple was destroyed. Now, there are some verses in Luke 21 that may raise questions about that. Yes, Jefferson? Is this taken from the King James? Yes.

The handout I've given you is the King James. I apologize. I used to use the King James when I made these, and I haven't had time to redo them with anything else.

Actually, I don't apologize for the King James. I like the King James. But unfortunately, it's not the version that we're using for the most part during the school.

We're using the New King James more commonly. So, it will differ a little bit from the New King James, but less so than from other modern translations. The material in Luke 21 does contain a few verses that are very tempting to apply to the second coming of Christ.

Yet, the question asked by the disciples in the beginning, especially in verse 7 of Luke 21, was, Teacher, when will these things be, and what sign will there be when these things are about to take place? The question is twofold, and both parts of the question have to do with these things. Which things? Well, Jesus had said that not one stone of the temple will be left standing on another that will not be thrown down. He, in other words, described the end of Jerusalem and the end of the temple.

And they said, when will that be, and what sign will there be that that's about to happen? At the end of the discussion, as we also saw in yesterday's discussion, Jesus said that this generation, in verse 32 of Luke 21, surely I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled. Now, it's also the case that several verses earlier, in Luke 21, 23, Jesus said, but woe to those who are pregnant, no, not that verse, verse 22, excuse me, for these are the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Now, much of what is in Luke 21 has often and traditionally been applied to the second coming of Christ.

This is largely due to the ignorance of the average person as to what happened within that generation, and the assumption that Jesus is talking about his second coming in this passage has led to a tremendous amount of embarrassment and a very fanciful biblical interpretation, especially in trying to deal with the expression this generation will not pass. We closed our session last time pointing out that the expression this generation is a frequently used expression in the teachings of Jesus, and in every other case, including the case just in the previous chapter to, in Matthew 23, just before Matthew 24, but in all the cases where Jesus speaks of this generation, he means his own generation, the people living at that time. And if that were not clear enough, we have another place where Jesus speaks and says, some of you standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

That's in Matthew 16, 28. Now, if the expression this generation is too nebulous, he puts it in a way that you can't miss. Some of you standing here will not taste death until this happens.

So that would seem to confirm, of course, the idea that this generation means the very

generation to whom he spoke, his own generation. And there's much to confirm it elsewhere as well. But what I'd like to do is go through those verses of the chapter that precede his declaration, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled, and to show you that in fact all those things were fulfilled.

All right? And I'm working from Matthew 24 for the most part. The handout I just gave you this morning is taken from Matthew 24. No doubt it's very confusing to you.

Mine is colored. I colored mine. And it makes things stand out more.

To yours, which is just in black and white, just looks like a bunch of black lines and scribbled words and so forth. But at least, even if you have a hard time deciphering it, if you hear me say anything that you'd like to document or check on later or remember later, it will be there for the most part. It will be there on the handout.

All right, let's look at this. Matthew 24, 3, the disciples said, tell us when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world or the end of the age. The King James says end of the world, but better translation is end of the age.

As I said yesterday, this rephrases the question, as we have it in the other two Gospels, Mark and Luke, as if there are now two questions. One is when will the temple be destroyed? That's the first question. When will these things be? And the second, when will be the second coming of Christ and the end of the world or the end of the age? Now, as I said yesterday, it is possible that Matthew is compressing.

I should say it's quite clear that he is compressing two narratives that are found in Luke 17 and Luke 21. And he may have modified the question as he states it from the Apostles' mouth in order to accommodate both narratives, one about the events of 70 AD, the other about the second coming of Christ. That is a possibility.

Another possibility is that he's simply paraphrasing what the disciples are recorded to have said in the other versions. The other versions, their second part of their question is what will be the sign that these things are going to happen and that these things in Matthew are said to be his coming and the end of the age. Now, we spent a good while yesterday talking about the fact that not every time that you read of his coming do we necessarily mean his second coming.

There are times when he speaks to the churches in Revelation and says he's going to come to them and do various things, but he's not in any of those cases talking about his second coming, in some cases he clearly is not. In the upper room he said to his disciples, I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you, in a case where he's talking about the Holy Spirit coming. And later in the same chapter he said, the Father and I will come to you if you love me and keep my commandments and so forth.

So there's many ways in which Jesus can come to us and can come. The Son of Man can

come to comfort, the Son of Man can come to bless, he can also come to judge, and he can also come, as he ultimately will, in his second coming, visibly and personally. But, and I want to make it clear, because many times people can get this wrong and think that I underplay the second coming of Christ.

I do not wish to do so. The second coming of Christ, as we have understood it and look forward to it, is a reality, and we anticipate it with great eagerness. But what I'm saying is it's not always that event that is referred to when the language of the Son of Man coming is being used.

Let me show you a few more examples of this before we get any further, because this is the thing that many people stumble on the most. I already showed you yesterday, Isaiah chapter 19, which is a prophecy of the judgment on Egypt, where it says the Lord rides on a swift cloud and he will come into Egypt. And yet it is not a statement about the Lord literally coming personally into Egypt, but rather coming in judgment against Egypt in the form of the armies of those who overran Egypt.

If you look at Daniel chapter 7 this time, we didn't look at this yesterday. This passage is commonly thought by a dispensationist to refer to the second coming of Christ. However, I think it can be shown that it does not refer to that.

In Daniel chapter 7, verse 13 and 14 says, I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. Now that sounds like the second coming. The language sounds very much like it, doesn't it? And yet it goes on to say, he came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people's nations and languages should serve him. And his dominion is an everlasting dominion, not a thousand year one, by the way, which shall not pass away. And his kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed.

Now the premillennialist thinks this won't happen until Jesus comes back, and so they apply this to the second coming. However, historically, Christians before dispensationalism believed that Jesus received a kingdom as a result of his first coming. The New Testament writers speak of Jesus as if he's already sitting on a throne in heaven.

He has returned to heaven. He's seated at the right hand of God from where he rules his people. He rules his kingdom.

Jesus said this himself in Revelation 3, 21, where he said, to him that I will grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome and am seated with my father on his throne. Jesus in Revelation 3, 21 says that he has already overcome, has already seated on his throne. In Revelation, or 1 Corinthians chapter 15, where Paul's talking on a rare

occasion about eschatology, he says that Jesus was resurrected first, then we will be resurrected at his coming, and then comes the end when he will have put all authority and dominion under his feet.

Then he goes on to say, for he must reign until he has done this. He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet, which means that his present reign must continue until he has conquered all his enemies. Peter said on the day of Pentecost, let all the house of Israel assuredly know that this Jesus whom you crucified, God has made him both Lord and Christ.

In other words, king. And Jesus is a king. That's why he's called king of kings and Lord of lords.

His kingdom has been established. He is ruling over it now from the right hand of God. Now, in Daniel chapter 7, verse 13, look at that closely.

He saw one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, and he came where? To earth? No, he came to the Ancient of Days. In Daniel, that's God in heaven. And they brought him near before him.

This is Jesus at his ascension. Daniel is in heaven, watching Jesus return to heaven. At his ascension, he came through the clouds.

Why in the clouds? Because it says in Acts chapter 1 that as Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples watched until a cloud received him out of their sight. Daniel, in his vision, is on the other side of those clouds, on the heaven side of those. And he's on the side where the Ancient of Days sits in heaven.

And he sees Jesus coming back, victorious from the cross and from the resurrection, coming into heaven, returning to his father, coming to the Ancient of Days, receiving a seat there at his right hand, and a kingdom to rule over, which we belong to, which we're citizens of. Now, this passage is not about the second coming of Christ. It sounds like it is, because it talks about one like the Son of Man coming in the clouds, but he's not coming to earth.

He's going the other way. He's coming to the Ancient of Days. Daniel is on the other side of the clouds, watching Jesus and describing him coming from that other side.

So here's another instance, like many others, where we can talk about the Son of Man coming, but we need to judge by the context. Is this the second coming or something else? Likewise, when the disciples said, what shall be the sign of your coming? Let us ask, and we must, did they understand their words, if they did use those exact words, as opposed to the ones that Luke and Mark refer to, if they used the words recorded in Matthew 24.3, what shall be the sign of your coming? And the end of the age, what did they understand by that expression, your coming? Let me ask you whether you think

they believed in the second coming at this point. How could they? They didn't even know Jesus was going away.

They didn't even, didn't have it clear in their mind he was going to die and resurrect or go back into heaven. Therefore, the concept of a second coming was the furthest thing from their mind. They thought that Jesus was soon going to come to power and take over the place.

They had some surprises in store for them. But the idea of the second coming, as we refer to that, they had never dreamed of up to that point. But where would they get this expression, then, his coming? Why would they speak of his coming? What would it refer to in their minds? Well, remember, Matthew 16.28, not so much before this, Jesus had said, some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

No doubt it was that statement or statements like it that they, from which they got the expression, your coming, something that would happen in their lifetime. Not necessarily the second coming, but maybe not at all clear in their minds of what it was. They associated it, apparently, with the destruction of Jerusalem, because that's the only reason for them to ask about it at this point.

He just said, you know, this temple is going to be destroyed. Not one stone is going to be left on another. They say, really? What are these things going to be? What's the sign of your coming? They thought of his coming in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem.

And apparently, rightly so. Unless, of course, we are going to be strict in applying this language always to the second coming of Christ, which does not seem an appropriate approach to take in many passages in the Bible. We do affirm the second coming of Christ, but we need to get over this tendency that we have to read the words of the disciples or the words of some of the Bible passages through the eyes of 20th century prophecy watchers, rather than seeing what these people meant and understood their words to mean and how they were expected to be understood.

Well, I'd like to suggest to you, they may be asking about the second coming, but I'm not sure where they got the idea of it. Although, of course, at the time Matthew wrote the Gospel of Matthew, he knew there'd be a second coming. He didn't at the time these words were uttered by the disciples, but by the time he wrote the Gospel of Matthew, the second coming had been revealed and Jesus was gone and they knew that he'd be coming back.

And it's possible that Matthew, knowing that he was now going to include material from Luke 17, which is about the second coming, that he just put the two together, modified the disciples' questions so that we've got both questions about two different events. The other possibility, as I've been mentioning, is that your coming is just another way of

saying the destruction of the temple, the judgment on Jerusalem, which is his coming and judgment, not literal coming personally, but in the figurative sense that the Bible sometimes speaks of God coming when he is judging a nation. Well, we won't worry too much about that right now.

Let's go on to see how Jesus answered their question. Verse 4, And Jesus answered and said to them, Take heed that no man deceives you, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in diverse places. All of these are only the beginning of sorrows.

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and deceive many, and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will become cold.

But he that shall endure to the end, the same will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come. When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, whosoever reads, let him understand.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take a thing out of his house. Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

And woe to them that are with child, and to them who give suck in those days. But pray you that your flight will not be in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved. But for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, lo here is Christ, or lo there, believe it not.

For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show signs and wonders insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive even the very elect. Behold, I have told you before, therefore if they shall say to you, behold, he is in the desert, do not go out. Behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not.

For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines even unto the west, so shall the parousia of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be

gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.

The stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken. 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.

And he will send his angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

So also you, when you see all these things, know that it is near even at the very doors. I surely I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things be fulfilled. Now I read that far because we have the question at the beginning of the passage and his prediction of the time restriction at the end, and therefore we need to find out in what sense his words could be true.

Now some of the words, especially from about verse 29 on, are perhaps very perplexing if you try to apply them to 7 AD. We'll look at those very carefully in a few minutes, but let's talk about the earlier parts. First of all, Jesus indicated there'd be many signs, but I want you to know one thing very important initially.

How many times he says, you. In verse 5 he says, take heed that no one deceives you. In verse 9 he says, they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations.

In verse 15, when you see the abomination of desolation. And verse 20, pray that your flight may not be in the winter on the Sabbath. And in verse 23, if anyone says to you, look, here's the Christ.

Sounds rather personal, doesn't it? Who's he talking to anyway? Well, Matthew doesn't tell us exactly, he just says the disciples, but Mark tells us that it was Peter, James, and John, and Andrew, four men in a private conversation with Jesus. That's in Mark 13.3. It was Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately. So when he said, when you see this, and this will happen to you, and don't you be deceived, and they're going to deliver you up, and you will be hated.

And when you see this, then your flight must be so-and-so. He's talking to these four guys, and he's giving them every impression that they are going to see this. That they are to be on the lookout, and the signs will appear in their lifetime.

Now, it's interesting that after verse 34, Matthew 24, Matthew 24, 34, after he says all these things will take place in this generation, the next verse says, heaven and earth will

pass away, but my word shall never pass away. And after that, he seems to talk about the second coming because he's mentioned heaven and earth passing away. Now that brings us to the subject of that day and hour of the heaven and earth passing away.

But you never see him say you, you, you anymore after that. No more you's after the this generation part. Everything up to verse 34 is peppered with references to you, you'll see this, you'll experience this, you'll have to face this.

And he's talking to his friends, his contemporaries, certainly giving them the impression that they will see it. Now how do dispensations deal with that fact? Well, they say he was speaking to the disciples as representatives of the Jewish race. Therefore, the you doesn't really mean you disciples, but you Jews as a class, as a race, because the Jews will be here during the tribulation period.

They say now this no doubt is very perplexing to suggest that he was speaking to his disciples as representatives of the Jewish race. We might as well say that in John 14, when he says, behold, I go to prepare a place for you and I will send my spirit to you. And if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

That he was speaking to them as representatives of the Jewish race. If they were representatives of anything, they were representatives of the church, not of the Jewish race. The disciples had been called out of the Jewish race into the Christian race.

In Christ, there's no Jew or Gentile. Therefore, if they represent anything other than who they were as individuals, they would have to represent Christians, not Jews. And that would, if the dispensations believes this is the tribulation period, put the Christians right in it.

But I don't believe that their disciples represent anybody. They asked him a personal question. He gives them a personal answer.

Listen, don't be deceived. You'll see this. You'll see that this will happen to you.

Be prepared for this. When you see that, do this. There's not a clue that he's talking to these four men as if they represent some larger entity in the last days, but rather he's talking to them.

They were concerned about their own skin. They were inhabitants of Jerusalem at this time. And he was predicting the end of the city.

They wanted to know when they should make their escape. And he tells them when they should make their escape. And by the way, let me say this, you know where he says, when you see this, then you who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

They did. We have it from every major church historian that knows anything about this.

Most of it's traced back to Eusebius, the third or fourth century Christian historian, in his book, Ecclesiastical History.

He says that before the Romans besieged the city of Jerusalem, the church, warned by an oracle from Christ, fled the city so that when Titus came and hemmed the city in, every Christian had escaped. Now, it's not clear from Eusebius' words, it's not at all clear whether the oracle from Christ was this oracle here, where he said, when you see this, then you flee, or whether it was more of a word in season, a timely utterance, a prophecy that was given in the church meeting. Some commentators on Eusebius think one way and some another.

It's not all that clear. But one thing is clear. It was Christ who warned his church who were in Jerusalem and therefore at risk to get out of Jerusalem before the judgment came upon them.

They were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not with fire. They were the fruitful trees, not to be thrown into the fire. They were the wheat to be gathered into the barn.

The chaff was to be burned with unquenchable fire. All these were the images that John the Baptist had used at that generation. In that generation, like every generation of Jews, there was a remnant who believed, and they were the Christians in this particular generation, and they escaped the judgment of God.

The rest who experienced those horrendous things of which Josephus wrote were all persons who had heard the gospel and rejected it. Sad, terribly sad, but no one can say that they didn't have a chance. If they had been linked with the body of Christ in their city, they would have been warned and would have been saved.

Because all the Christians, according to Eusebius, fled from the city, just as Jesus said to do. They went across the Jordan River to a place called Pella. King Agrippa, before whom Paul had stood in the book of Acts and Reasons, King Agrippa was the ruler of Pella, and he welcomed the Christians in.

I wonder if Paul's arguments and presentations before him had anything to do with paving the way for that. Paul never lived to see any fruit from his talk with Agrippa, though Agrippa left that conversation saying, you almost have persuaded me to become a Christian. And that was the last Paul saw.

He died not knowing whether Agrippa ever became one, and I don't know whether Agrippa became one either, but it may have been his exposure to Paul earlier on that caused Agrippa to be favorably disposed to the Christians and to welcome them into Pella when they escaped from the Holocaust in 70 AD. Fascinating stuff. Anyway, let's take a look at some of these other things.

Now, he says, you, you, you, all the way through this portion, which means his disciples

could expect to be alive at the time when these things happened. What are the first signs? Verse 4, take heed that no man deceives you, for many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many. The same or a very similar prediction is made in verses 23 and 24, where he says, then if any man shall say to you, lo, here is the Christ, or there, believe it not, for there shall arise many false Christs and false prophets.

Did this happen before 70 AD? It did. It did. Josephus made reference, if you read the material that I gave you, to a false prophet who told the people to hide up on a portico of the temple from which they were killed.

About 6,000, I think he said, or maybe it was 2,000, but several thousand women and children were killed because they followed the advice of a false prophet at that time. Josephus himself claimed to be a prophet, but not being a Christian, I think he must have been a false prophet too. But at least as heathen Jews go, he was a little more decent than some of his countrymen.

But we're told right in the scriptures themselves about one very important false prophet named Simon Magus. He is mentioned in Acts chapter 8. He lived in Samaria. He was a magician who had mighty powers.

And reading from Acts chapter 8, it sounds like he was converted through the preaching of Philip. You remember, he's the one who offered Peter money if he could receive the power to lay hands on people so they could receive the Holy Spirit. And Peter said, your money perished with you.

Well, this Simon Magus, as he's usually called, was well known in later church history. And many of the early church fathers tell us things that happened to him later. He later went to Rome and became sort of a magician false prophet that impressed the emperors.

Emperor Nero was impressed with him. In fact, there's a story. It's apocryphal.

We don't know whether it really happened or not. But there's a story that Peter and Paul were both in Rome and Simon Magus was doing magic tricks to entertain the emperor. And he was levitating and flying around a few feet off the ground.

And Peter and Paul prayed and rebuked the demons. And Simon Magus fell to the ground. I think he broke his legs or something like that.

And that got Peter and Paul in trouble with Nero. Both of them were later executed by Nero. But that is maybe not a true story, but it is.

It comes from one of the church fathers. It's an apocryphal story about Simon Magus. But we do have some information from Justin Martyr, who was very early.

I think his time was what, from 60 AD to about 100 AD or something, a little more than that, a little later than that. 130 AD. Anyway, pretty early on.

Justin Martyr reported that Simon Magus was worshipped as a god in Rome because of his magical powers during the reign of Claudius. Jerome, a somewhat later church father, said, well, he quotes Simon as saying, I am the word of God. I am the comforter.

I am the Almighty. I am all there is of God. Irenaeus, another very early church father, a disciple of John, the apostle, tells that Simon claimed to be the son of God and the creator of the angels.

Now, it sounds as if this guy was a false Christ, a false messiah, claimed to be the word of God, the creator of the angels, the Almighty God. There was a false Christ, and he deceived many. Origen, another church father in the late 200s AD, in the late third century, century in other words, no, late second century, excuse me, Origen reports the claims of one, Decithius, who claimed to be the Christ foretold by Moses.

This was during that period also that Origen refers to. Josephus describes a time of Felix in these words. I'm quoting Josephus.

Now, as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was again filled with robbers and impostors who deluded the multitude. Yet did Felix catch and put into death many of those impostors every day together with the robbers. Impostors who deluded the people, no doubt claiming to be saviors and so forth.

We know after 70 AD of another one who in 135 AD convinced most of the remaining Jews to resist the Romans the last time, and then they were all wiped out. But the city was wiped out in 70 AD. But there were false Christ and false messiahs that arose during the period before 70 AD.

Josephus and the Bible itself attest to that, as well as some of the church fathers. Now, going on, oh, by the way, just in case you're not sure about that, we have another biblical proof of that in 1 John, excuse me, don't have this in your notes, I don't think, but maybe I do. But in 1 John chapter 4, begin with verse 1, John says, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Many false prophets had gone out in John's day, many. And therefore, Jesus was quite correct when he indicated that the apostles would see a time when there would be false Christ and false prophets, and that they should not be deceived. Now, back to Matthew 24, verse 6. Jesus said, And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in diverse places. All these are the

beginning of sorrows, or birth pangs.

You know, it's a funny thing, these very things, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and so forth, they're being heralded by today's prostitutes as signs of the end. Jesus says, These aren't signs of the end. When you hear of these, the end is not yet.

These are the beginning, not the end. These are the beginning of sorrows, beginning of birth pangs. He doesn't associate these things with the end.

He says, These are things that are going to happen that will make you think it's the end, but it isn't. When these kinds of things happen, and all hell seems to be breaking loose, and there's wars on every side, and earthquakes, and the earth seems to be breaking up, you think it's the end of the world, but don't worry, it's not. That's not the end, he said.

Now, what about wars and rumors of wars? Well, from reading Josephus, as well as the secular historians, we know that among the Jews, there were tremendous wars and rumors of wars. The Jews were being butchered all over the empire, especially after 66 AD, when the initial revolt of the Jews took place, and the war lasted for three and a half years, from 66 to 70, when Jerusalem fell in September of 70 AD. But the Jews were being massacred all over the place.

Josephus tells us that the Jews in Alexandria, there was an uprising against the Jews in Alexandria. In Seleucia, 50,000 Jews were slain. In Caesarea, which was up to the north of Jerusalem on the coast, 20,000 Jews were killed in battle by Syrians.

The hostility between the Jews and the Syrians divided many towns and villages into armed camps. Constant rumors of wars kept the Jews in an unsettled state, some even fearing to plow and seed the ground. Some wouldn't even go out and farm because there was so much danger.

And if you read the material I gave you from Josephus yesterday, you know that, I think it's on page two of the material that I gave you, there's a list of some of those slaughters of the Jews that we just mentioned. I mean, if you were living at that time, you'd hear rumors all the time. If you're a Jew in Jerusalem, or a Jew in Israel, hearing that, you know, 50,000 of your countrymen had been slain in Syria, and 20,000 had just been slain in Caesarea, and there was an uprising against them in Alexandria, and Jews were, you know, being invaded from all sides.

But besides that, it was an international thing. Jesus said, kingdom shall rise against kingdom, and nation against nation. This was an international thing.

The whole Roman Empire was thrust into turmoil because Nero committed suicide in 69 AD. And that heightened problems a great deal because there was no natural successor. And therefore, a guy named, I think it was Galba, took the throne after Nero, but he was

assassinated within a few months.

I think three months later, he was assassinated by a guy named Otho. And Otho, I believe, reigned for about six months and was assassinated by Bacillus. And then after that, Vespasian, who was actually besieging Jerusalem at that very time, was declared emperor by his men.

And when other Roman troops heard about it elsewhere, they also agreed to declare Vespasian as emperor. And so he went back to Rome to take his throne. And it was later from there he sent back Titus to besiege Jerusalem again.

It was during that time when Vespasian withdrew and before Titus came back that the Christians fled from Jerusalem because Jesus said, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near and you who are in Judea flee to the mountains. And they did. That's according to Luke 21.

Now, these wars were going on. Rome was thrust into civil wars as one emperor candidate was killing off other emperor candidates. And the whole city of Rome was thrust into battle.

It really seemed as if the end of the world was near for many people. The Jews were facing slaughter on every side and the Gentiles too. Their kingdom was in turmoil.

It is certainly not inaccurate to say there were wars and rumors of war all about. That year, 69 A.D. and into 70 A.D., is sometimes called the year of the five emperors. Because after Nero, there was Galba, Otho, and Vitellus, and then Vespasian.

Five guys in the space of really 18 months. So that was a very unsettled time, a time of great war and uprising, civil wars, as well as wars against the Jews. That is what Jesus said the disciples would see and many of them did live to see that.

He also mentions in verse 7, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. Now famines and pestilences often are the normal accompaniments of war. Whenever a city is besieged, the idea is to starve them out.

The people begin to starve to death. Usually the crops outside the city walls are stripped and eaten by the soldiers who are besieging the city. As Josephus said, some people wouldn't even go out and plant their crops because of the dangers of going outdoors.

And there were famines. We read of one famine that was not even related to that war in the book of Acts, which is said to have taken place in the time of Claudius. It's mentioned in Acts chapter 11, that there was a famine predicted by Agabus the prophet and it came to pass during the reign of Claudius.

That was an empire-wide famine. And then there are of course the famines of local areas

that were hard pressed by war. There's no question that there were famines at the time.

And pestilences, pestilences would be disease. If you read what Josephus wrote about the siege of Jerusalem, you know that disease and starvation ran rampant throughout the city. I mean there were putrefying bodies stacked up everywhere.

People were just stepping over them. They wouldn't dare to bury them. And at one point Josephus says they were just throwing bodies over the wall to get them out of the city until the Kidron Valley below just filled up with dead corpses and so forth.

This was a very, I'm sure disease was just rampant as it would be in any siege where there's just dead bodies putrefying in the streets and so forth. And great plagues upon the people. Now as far as earthquakes go, I have heard people say repeatedly that there's more earthquakes these days than there have been in all of history before.

And that may be true. I don't know if that's true or not. Jesus didn't say there'd be more earthquakes than in any time of history.

He did say there would be earthquakes though in diverse places. And there were before 70 AD. I've given you some of them here.

Just previous to 70 AD, there were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colossae, Campania, Rome, and Judea according to the contemporary writers of the period. And Pompeii was greatly damaged by an earthquake in February of 63 AD. Now just in that last decade before 70 AD, there were earthquakes in all those places.

Now Jesus didn't say there'd be more than ever before or ever after. He just said there'd be earthquakes in a lot of places and there were. Therefore, everything Jesus said would happen there, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, all those things did happen.

And we can read on, verse 9, he says, then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you and you should be hated by all nations for my name's sake. Many will be offended and shall betray one another and shall hate one another. And because false prophets shall arise, they shall deceive many.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will become cold. But he that endures the end, the same shall be saved. Now he tells the disciples they're going to be killed.

They were. They were martyred. He says you'll be hated by all nations, that people will betray one another.

Paul said in 2nd Timothy, which was written in the mid-60s AD, he said that all men had

forsaken him. Demas had forsaken him, having loved his present world, and so forth. We can see the love of many was becoming cold.

Many people had ceased to love the Lord. The church of Ephesus, according to Revelation, had lost their first love. And that doesn't take very long.

And so we have biblical witness that these things all did happen. In the first century, and we certainly have a record in the book of Acts of the persecution that broke out. Many Christians were killed in the book of Acts.

Stephen was stoned. Peter and John were beaten. There was general persecution in Acts chapter 8. Saul, of course, persecuted the church in chapter 9. James was beheaded in chapter 12 of Acts.

Paul was persecuted from city to city, as were his converts. Therefore, when Jesus said you will be hated, you'll be persecuted, you'll be killed, it all came true. They were.

That's how they were treated. Now, there is one statement here that has caused some people to think that we must not have 70 AD here in view. That's in verse 14.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come. Now, the question here, of course, is what end? The end of the world? Or the end of these things that he's predicting? The end of Jerusalem and the end of that age, of the Jewish age? Well, it could be seen either way. You might say, well, it couldn't be seen any other way than the end of the world because he said the gospel could be preached to all nations as a witness to all people, and then the end will come.

So it couldn't have been talked about 70 AD there because, hey, I mean, all the nations haven't been reached yet. However, let me turn your attention over to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1 verse 6, after he speaks about how they had received and heard the truth of the gospel, he says in verse 6, which has come to you, that is the gospel has, as it also has in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit as it is also among you since the day you heard it and knew the grace of God in truth. Now, Paul said that as he wrote the book of Colossians in about 62 AD probably, that the gospel had come to all the world in the way he preferred to speak.

And in the same chapter, verse 23, Colossians 1, 23, Paul says, if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. Now, Paul speaks in the past tense, the gospel was preached to every creature under heaven. Sounds pretty all-inclusive.

What do we have here? Was Paul mistaken? Did Paul think everybody had now heard the gospel, that every nation had been reached? Of course not. As he sat there in Rome in

prison, he knew very well that Spain hadn't been reached, or Britain. He was planning to go there himself for the very reason that that was still an unreached area.

What he's doing here is employing hyperbole. He knew not every creature under heaven had heard the gospel. He knew it had never gotten yet at this point to India, but they knew about India.

Thomas later went there. He knew that it hadn't gotten to Spain or Britain. That's why he was making plans to go that direction.

So was he lying? No, he was using hyperbole. And we've talked about hyperbole before. It's a common enough phenomenon in the scripture.

We might as well take account of it. He was basically just saying the gospel had been widespread and preached in many, many nations to a very broad sampling. And by way of hyperbole, he says it's come to all the world.

It's been preached to every creature under heaven. We will find more examples of that kind of hyperbole even in the course of this study today when talking about another passage. But let me just say this.

There can be no doubt that Paul knew that the gospel had not really been preached to every nation under heaven when he said that. Yet he had no problem saying it, even though his readers knew that too. It was expected to be understood as a hyperbole.

But the question then is, if Paul can speak in a hyperbole that way,