

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 24:4 - 24:13



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg examines Matthew 24 and provides insight into its two subjects- the 70 AD event and the Second Coming of Christ. He explains that Matthew combined two separate discourses of Jesus, which can be found in different contexts in Luke. Gregg goes on to highlight the occurrence of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes around 70 AD and how Jesus predicted false Christs and false prophets. He concludes by emphasizing that Jesus was directing his discourse towards his disciples and emphasizing the importance of understanding the end times.

### Transcript

Today we're going to continue looking at the Olivet Discourse that is recorded in Matthew 24. It is also found in Mark chapter 13 and in Luke chapter 21, but we come to it now as part of our study through the Gospel of Matthew, and therefore we study it here as it occurs in Matthew 24. We found that the occasion of the discourse was that Jesus walked out of the temple and made a statement about the doom of the temple.

He said not one stone would be left standing on another that would not be thrown down. Obviously the reference being thrown down means this would be a violent overthrow. The temple would be destroyed forcibly by invaders.

The disciples understood this to be more than a little bit significant. The destruction of Jerusalem and of its temple is not comparable to simply the destruction of some other great ancient city like Babylon or Troy or something like that or Nineveh, because Jerusalem and its overthrow is significant in terms of God's covenantal dealings with his people Israel. Jerusalem and its temple were symbols of the whole Jewish enterprise, the whole Jewish commonwealth, and of the Jewish people and of its religion and of the covenant they had with God, and therefore the destruction of the temple, its utter annihilation as it were, its leveling to the ground, could be little else than the end of the whole Jewish age, and that's in fact what it was.

The temple was destroyed historically, we know this, in 70 A.D. Now Jesus uttered these words in 30 A.D., so it was just one generation within that generation that this all

happened. Now the disciples, when they heard it, they came to him and asked him, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming in the end of the age? Now we saw last time that when you compare this question, as it's recorded in Matthew 24-3, with the same question recorded by Mark and Luke, that Mark and Luke clarify what the disciples really meant. When we hear them saying, What shall be the sign of your coming? We immediately think of the second coming, but they wouldn't have thought of the second coming.

They didn't even know Jesus was going away, much less did they know he was going to come again. They were using the term coming in the sense that it was used frequently in the Old Testament, when God would come and destroy a people, destroy a kingdom that was under judgment. Jesus had just described such a judgment on Jerusalem, and he was going to be coming in judgment on Jerusalem, as he came in judgment on Babylon, or on Egypt, or on any other group of nations that God visited with destruction in the Old Testament.

And so they were speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, it would appear, when they said, What shall be the sign of your coming and of the end of this age, the end of the Jewish age? Now, Jesus' answer is lengthy. And as a matter of fact, we will find that the answer as it is given in Matthew 24 actually combines material from more than one discourse of Jesus. Now, I don't mean to confuse you, so please pay careful attention.

If you will look at the material in this discourse that Jesus gave in answer to the disciples' question, you'll find that Matthew has combined discourses from two different places in Luke, two different discourses. Now, this should not be surprising. Matthew arranges the material in his gospel topically rather than chronologically.

This has been observed by all scholars of the gospels, and it's a recognized thing. The evidence for it is abundant, that Matthew tends to group the sayings of Jesus into topical collections, rather than necessarily just telling us everything at the moment he said it. And by the way, that's a helpful thing to do.

And when he gave us the Sermon on the Mount, or some of these other discourses that are found in Matthew, we have very strong evidence that he combined various discourses that Jesus made on various occasions on the same subject, or comments he made, and put them all in one place for us, so that we could see the whole teaching of Jesus on a topic at one time. Now, Matthew 24 is apparently such a composite also, because in Luke chapter 17, beginning at verse 20, we have a discourse of Jesus, and in Luke 21, we have a different discourse of Jesus in Luke on a different occasion, different audience, in fact. In Luke 17, the Pharisees demanded of Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and he gave them an answer.

In Luke 21, the disciples came and asked him about the destruction of Jerusalem, and he gave them an answer. These discourses are separate in time, and in audience, and in

subject matter. The discourse in Luke 17 is apparently about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world.

The discourse in Luke 21 is about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., judging from the question that sparked it. Now, if this is so, then when Matthew combines these two, then we have in Matthew 24 a composite. Part of it appears to be about 70 A.D. Another part appears to be about the second coming of Christ.

Most scholars can recognize this without difficulty, though not everybody agrees as to which parts apply to which events. If one would say, well, if Matthew has combined two different discourses, one of them about 70 A.D., and one of them about the second coming of Christ, then when we're reading Matthew 24, how do we know which parts apply to which events? Well, there's no cause for alarm. It's very easy to answer that.

You see, there were two discourses of Jesus, one recorded in Luke 17, one recorded in Luke 21. Matthew puts them together. The way to know the subject matter of any portion in Matthew 24 is to say, is this comment a parallel to Luke 17, or is it a parallel to Luke 21? Because both the discourses in those two chapters are put together here.

Now, if a passage in Matthew 24 is parallel to Luke 17, which is a discourse about the second coming of Christ, well, then it would seem that that portion, that statement in Matthew 24 is also about the second coming of Christ. On the other hand, if a statement in Matthew 24 is parallel to Luke 21, which is a discourse about 70 A.D., then that statement, as it appears in Matthew 24, is known to be about 70 A.D. and not about the second coming of Christ. When this is done, it makes it rather simple, for the most part, to know which parts of Matthew 24 apply to which events.

In general, the first 35 verses of Matthew 24 are parallel to Luke 21. Now, if you read Luke 21, you'll find that that is a discourse about 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem. In fact, if that's not clear to you, all you need to do is look at Luke 21, 20, where Jesus said to his disciples, When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.

Okay, well, it was. The disciples, some of them did live to see that day. And Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, and its desolation was near, and it did come.

So, it's quite clear in Luke 21 that Jesus is giving a discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Now, the first 35 verses, approximately, of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 parallels Luke 21, verse by verse, or thought for thought. And therefore, we know that the first section of Matthew 24 is talking about 70 A.D., because we read of that clearly in Luke 21, in the parallel. Now, after that point, in Matthew 24, verse 36 and following, it largely parallels Luke 17, which is a different discourse on a different subject.

In Luke 17, Jesus appears to be talking about the second coming of Christ and the judgment of the world. And that is in Luke 17, we find that material reproduced in Matthew 24, verses 36 and following. So that we can say, in general, the first 35 verses of Matthew 24 are talking about 70 A.D., because they parallel Luke 21, which is about that.

And from 36 on in Matthew 24, that's talking about the second coming of Christ, because they parallel Luke 17, which is about the second coming of Christ. So, we have in Matthew 24, two subjects addressed, but only because Matthew has combined for us two discourses of Jesus, which are found in separate places and separate contexts in Luke. Now, if someone says, well, why would Matthew do this? Well, as I said, this is Matthew's habit in his gospel.

There are five discourses recorded in Matthew, and each of them appear to be a composite of several statements that Jesus made on different occasions. An amalgam made up of a variety of things Jesus said on a subject. Apparently, because both the discourse Jesus gave on the second coming in Luke 17, and the discourse he gave on 70 A.D. in Luke 21, both of them are examples of Jesus giving discourses about future events.

Matthew put them both together, not necessarily implying that 70 A.D. and the end of the world are the same thing, but rather that these are the times when Jesus spoke about the future. And so, Matthew puts it all together in one place. It is for us to recognize when he shifts from one subject to the next.

Unfortunately, Christians have done very poorly in discerning the difference between what Jesus said about 70 A.D. and what he said about the time of his coming, and have generally applied the whole discourse, or most of it, to the time of the end. That is, the end of the world, or the time just before the second coming of Christ. Let me read, for example, the beginning portion of this discourse.

In verse 4, in answer to the disciples' question, Jesus answered and said to them, Take heed that no one deceives you, for many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

And then many will be offended, and betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise and deceive many, and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come. Now, I'm going to pause there. There's much more here, but we're going to have limits to what we can do in this session.

There's much already in this passage that requires some examination, because it is here that we read of wars and rumors of wars, of famines and pestilences, false Christs, false prophets, and so forth. And these are the very things that many Christians tell us, since they are happening today, they're saying these are the signs of the times. But the signs of what times? Jesus did give these as evidences of something coming near, but what would it be? Well, we know that in both Luke and Mark, the disciples asked about the destruction of Jerusalem.

They said, what shall be the sign that these things are about to come to pass? And Jesus gave them this response. Now, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., and if Jesus is answering the actual question of the disciples, then we should look to the time prior to 70 A.D. and see if these things ever happened. Well, the first thing that Jesus said would happen would be that there's false Christs.

He said in verse 4, take heed that no one deceives you, for many will come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and will deceive many. Did that happen before 70 A.D.? It certainly did. We know of at least one case that the Bible itself records, and that's Simon the sorcerer in Acts chapter 8, verses 9 through 10.

We're told that they were, the people of Samaria were convinced that he was the mighty power of God because of the magic he did. More than that, this man whose name was Simon Magus was well-known in early church history, and some of the early church fathers tell us more about him. Justin Martyr, for example, reports that Simon the sorcerer was worshipped as a god in Rome because of his powers, and that they, in the reign of Claudius, they made a statue in his honor.

Jerome quotes Simon as saying, I am the word of God, I am the comforter, I am almighty, I am all there is of God. Irenaeus tells us that Simon claimed to be the son of God and the creator of the angels. Now, this man was contemporary with the apostles and certainly lived before 70 A.D., and, in fact, his entire career probably began and ended before 70 A.D. Here's a man claiming to be God, claiming to be the word of God, the son of God, the creator of angels.

Is this not a false Christ? I certainly would suggest that he is. Origen also reports the claims of a man named Josephus, who claimed to be the Christ foretold by Moses. This is someone who allegedly arose before 70 A.D. Josephus, who, of course, is a Jewish historian of the period and was not at all familiar with the sayings of Jesus, he described the time of Felix, which was, of course, contemporary with Paul prior to 70 A.D. Josephus says this, Now, as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was again filled with robbers and imposters who deluded the multitude.

Yet did Felix catch and put to death many of those imposters every day together with the robbers. Now, Josephus says there were many imposters. What were these imposters? Well, almost certainly they were people who were professing to be something they were not, and to the Jews, deluding the Jews, leading them astray.

These were people claiming to be the Messiah and deceiving the Jews. Jesus said there would be many who would come in his name saying they are the Messiah and would deceive many. Well, that did happen, didn't it? Josephus bears witness to that.

What about famines and pestilences? Well, we read of at least one of those happening before 70 A.D. in Acts chapter 11 and verse 28. In Acts 11, 28, we're told that in the reign of Claudius around 50 A.D. that there was a famine that swept the whole land. And there's more than that.

That's just one that's recorded, but at least the Bible itself affirms that there was a very serious famine that occurred in that period. And as far as earthquakes, well, what about earthquakes in diverse places? Just previous to 70 A.D., there were earthquakes in the following places according to contemporary historians. See if this qualifies.

There was an earthquake in Crete. There was one in Smyrna, one in Miletus, in Chios. There was one in Samos, in Laodicea, in Hierapolis, in Colossae, in Campania.

There was one in Rome, and there was one in Judea according to the contemporary writers of the time. All of this just prior to 70 A.D. There certainly were earthquakes in diverse places. In fact, in 63 A.D., in February, Pompeii was greatly damaged in an earthquake.

So we have quite a few earthquakes that occurred in various places, as Jesus said they would, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Now what about this wars and rumors of wars? Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of wars. Nations shall rise up against nations, etc.

Well, shortly after this discourse was uttered, there were four emperors who came to violent deaths in the space of only 18 months. There was an uprising against the Jews in Alexandria. In Seleucia, 50,000 Jews were slain in uprisings against them.

In Caesarea, about 20,000 Jews were slain by the Syrians. Hostility between the Jews and Syrians divided many towns and villages into armed camps. Constant rumors of wars kept the Jews in an unsettled state for the whole time.

Some were even fearing to go out and plow and cede their grounds, said Josephus. So, during the time, this was just prior to the Jewish War, there were great hostilities toward the Jews in various places. In Alexandria, Egypt, in Syria, and in various places, they were hearing of Jews being slaughtered by people attacking them, by uprisings against them.

This certainly is wars and rumors of wars. When there were civil wars in Rome because of the violent deaths of four emperors within 18 months, that certainly would have been a rumor that reached Jerusalem. It was not a peaceful time, the period from 30 AD to 70 AD, and especially near the end there, it became anything but a peaceful time for the Jewish people.

Now, what else is predicted here? In verse 9, Jesus said, And then they will deliver you, these would be the disciples. Now, if you'll recall, if you read the parallel account to this in Mark 13, there were four men that Jesus was saying this to. They were Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew.

These four men came privately to Jesus and had an audience with Him, asked Him the question recorded here, and they received this answer. So, when Jesus says, You, He means you men, you four. He's not talking about somebody living in the end times.

He's talking to the men who asked Him the question, and He's giving them their answer. He says, Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. Now, that's true.

The apostles were treated just that way. In fact, James, one of them, was the first apostle to be martyred, and he was killed as is recorded in Acts chapter 12. John was also badly treated and subjected to what would have been mortal danger, but he was supernaturally spared.

He was apparently dipped in boiling oil, but he survived without harm, it would appear. As far as Peter, he was crucified upside down. And Andrew, well, he also suffered a martyr's death.

And therefore, we find that Jesus, talking to these four men, said that they would be hated, and they would be killed for His name's sake. And He says, And then many will be offended, that means stumbled, and will betray one another and will hate one another. Well, the Bible says that that actually happened.

Paul said, Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. His love for God had grown cold. In fact, Paul said that at his first defense, all his friends forsook him.

We read of many departing from the faith in the New Testament, and it doesn't take very many to be a fulfillment of this. You see there, Jesus said that many will fall away, the love of many will grow cold because of the persecutions and so forth. And it says in verse 11, Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

We point out that we have read of those already in history. Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Remember in Revelation chapter 2, we read that the first love of the Ephesians had grown cold.

They had left their first love. The Laodicean church was no longer hot. It was lukewarm.

It was growing cold. Jesus said that would happen, you see. But Jesus said, But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Now here, we need to understand the end probably differently than in verse 3, because in the end, in verse 3, it is the end of the age. It could be that he means the end of the age here, of course, but not all the good people survived until then. Many of the disciples, like James and Peter and so forth, were dead before then.

And so when he says, Endures to the end will be saved, it doesn't necessarily mean that they endure to the end of the age, because many people are saved who did not survive that long. In all likelihood, when he says, He that endures to the end will be saved, he means to the end of their life. That is, whoever does not defect.

There will be many whose love is growing cold, he says. Many will fall away, but those who do not, those who to the end of their life remain faithful, will be saved. Just as Jesus told the church of Smyrna in Revelation 2.10, Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

So in this verse, this is Matthew 24.13, He who endures to the end should not probably be understood to be the end of which they asked, the end of the age, because that would be a certain year and a certain time. But to endure to that year would not be necessary to be saved, since there are many Christians like Stephen and most of the apostles who died before that came. So Jesus is talking to the disciples about what they can look for in their own personal futures.

And they did see these things. These things did happen. We'll talk more about this discourse and give more detail on it next time.

I hope you'll be able to join us as we continue studying Matthew 24.