

The Time of Trouble

Matthew 24:1-31

Setting the stage:

Longest teaching by Jesus

Follows in Matthew's argument as the culmination of the Kingdom teaching

We will be looking at this long discourse in two sermons. Very important to be sure we follow the flow and the connections...

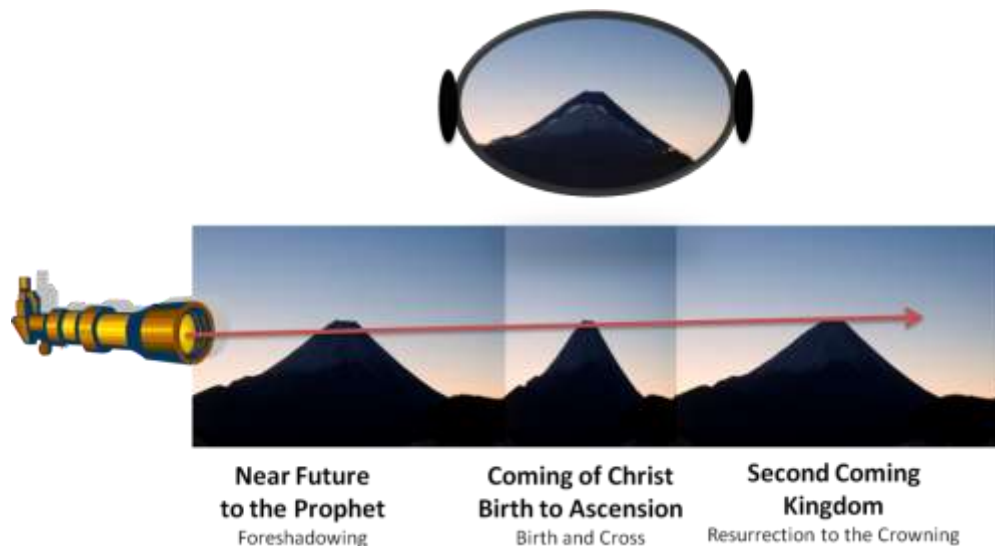
Familiarize yourself with this word, *PAROUSIA*. This is the word used in the New Testament to refer to the coming, the appearing, the final revelation of Jesus Christ. So Jesus' *parousia* is His coming and coronation at the end of days.

Three Horizons of prophecy

First horizon - Old Testament event

Middle horizon - Christ events (**where we are**)

Future horizon - End-of-times Events



The Prompting Occasion (v.1-3)

What caused Jesus to teach this and why is Matthew recording here?

¹ Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"

The Disciples Concern (v.1)

They understand that Jesus is describing the demise of Israel. They are starting to get what He is teaching them in the parables. They are concerned about the permanence of the Temple. They are walking around showing the greatness and grandeur of a Temple of their day. It is almost as though they want Him to moderate what He has been saying. God wouldn't destroy such a fine Temple, would He?

The Lord's Prediction (v.2)

Jesus declares that all this great edifice of Judaism will come tumbling down. It is not just the Temple whose stones will lie scattered in ruins, but it is the whole of the Mosaic system and Israel as a nation. Ruin, desolation, destruction.

Matthew is highlighting the same near destruction

Writing around 63-65AD within 5-7 years of the Temple's destruction

The Disciples' Question (v.3)

Question 1: When will this demise and destruction take place?

Their response to Jesus' clear prediction - when will it take place?

Question 2: What will be the sign of the closing events - end of the age and the coming of Christ?

They are connecting these as a single cluster of events. They see the destruction of the Temple and the Lord's return as close together. At this point, they do not understand the centuries that would unfold in the inauguration of the Kingdom. Remember, however, the parables intimated it.¹

The Warning Predictions (v.4-14)

Jesus then labors to disconnect these things. The destruction of the Temple and the city are not close in time to the Lord's return. Picking up on language from the book of Daniel, connecting it the point of His parables, Jesus' answer highlights the long and often difficult development of the Kingdom.

But this is not even the primary focus in Jesus' answer. He is primarily concerned about their being led astray. They have a misplaced sense of what the danger is. They see the danger in the destruction of the Temple. Jesus sees the primary danger in the persecution, power and eventual presence of false Messiahs.

It is critical for us to understand what follows and not fall into the trap of using Jesus' answers to further the disciples' agenda and concerns. The focus here is *not* on the danger of destruction but on the deadliness of apostasy.

The Beginning of the Troubles (v.4-8)

⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' 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 and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

There will be a long period of time in which there will be many, many difficult things take place. It will begin in the disciples' lifetime. They will experience their own lifetimes what will take place over the whole growth of the kingdom. Right from the beginning, false teachers, prophets and fake messiahs have arisen seeking to lead God's people astray.

That it will be a long is clear from the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms. There will be great natural upheavals and disasters. These are only the beginnings of the birth pains. Don't be disturbed by all this. The worst is yet to come.

The Escalation of the Tribulations (v.9-13)

There will be growing persecution and apostasy in the midst of downward moral spiral.

⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Jesus highlights the characteristics of this time.

It will be marked by terrible persecution and the suffering it brings.

It will be filled with apostasy, with mass defections from the faith.

It will be populated with false prophets who will pretend to be the promised Messiah leading people away from the faith.

It will be saturated with lawlessness and lovelessness as expressions of great and rapid moral decline.

Those who hold fast to faith (endure) through all of this will be saved. Those who do not abandon faith (apostatize) by following false leaders or by failing under terrible pain will be saved. This book of Hebrews like exhortation is what Jesus is focused on. May God's people hold fast through to the end so that they be saved. God's people will hold fast till the end through exhortations like this. Through exhortations like this, holding fast grace is given to His true people.

The Culmination of the Testimony (v.14)

In the midst of those terrible days, God will continue to advance His kingdom until the culmination of the testimony.

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

This is connected to Matthew 10:18:

¹⁶ "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

There Jesus sends his disciples out to Israel. There He anticipates what He predicts here. Our preaching and witness advances in the midst of persecution. Jesus connects two important events, one we are participating in now and the other we are anticipating soon.

Before the end comes, there will be a world-wide preaching of the kingdom as both a saving and an condemning witness. The "testimony" here is that which is called in court as evidence against the prosecuted. So the global spread of the gospel will save God's people and will condemn those who do not believe.

Brother and sisters, we are on a great mission. We will preach the gospel here and everywhere. We will expect growing persecution and suffering as we stand for the truth. We must hold fast to the faith as false teachers and prophets and fake messiahs will rise. Hold fast because God says so and God enables it.

The Connecting Event (v.15-28)

Jesus identifies a significant future event from the Scripture.

¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

A Great Sacrilege (v. 15)

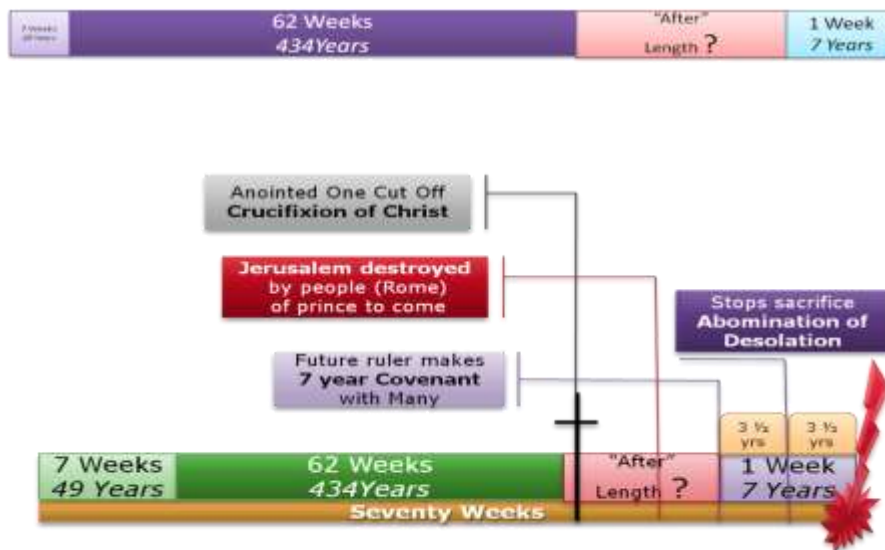
When you see ‘the desolating sacrilege,’ which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place

Connection to Daniel 9:24-27:

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Also connected to Daniel 12:8-13:

⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, “O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?” ⁹ He said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. ¹¹ And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. ¹² Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days. ¹³ But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”



What have we learned from Daniel and need to be aware of here for Jesus’ allusion? Matthew highlights the importance of going back to Daniel to understand what Jesus is talking about.

There were going to be seventy sets of seven years from the decree to begin the temple till the cutting off, the death of the Messiah (the Anointed One).

After the Messiah, the Romans (the nation of a future prince), will destroy the city and the Temple.

There will be a time during which there will be wars and desolations (for the Jewish people).

The prince, who we now know to be over the Roman/Western civilization, will make a covenant, possibly, treaty with the Jews for seven years.

In the middle of the week or for half the week (More literal) this prince will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings.

That event is called the Abomination of Desolation and is what Jesus is pointing to.

From that event until the end, there will be further destruction until the one causing them is brought to his decreed end.

I would commend to if you are new to the Chapel, to go to our website and download the pod casts and manuscripts for Daniel. There is so much there that is landing here in this text. Several times in Daniel, this idea of 3½ years is important² and is picked up here by Jesus and by Paul in both 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

Why still future? Does this refer to events that took place in 70AD at the fall of Jerusalem? As a foreshadowing, yes, but not as the final fulfillment. The language of Daniel 9 points to some-time later. The events around 70AD are similar, but not complete. Certainly, the Lord did not return then, particularly as Jesus will describe in the next few texts.

So, in the middle of a seven year covenant between a great future leader of the west and Israel, an event will take place fulfilling Daniel 9, 11 and this text. It will be a great sacrilege to the Jews and will desolate their place of worship.

A Great Tribulation (v. 15-22)

That event will unleash a great time of tribulation for God's people, for those who believe in Jesus.

¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁹ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, 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 human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Of Terrible Suffering (v. 15-21)

It will be a time of such terrible suffering that Jesus has difficulty even explaining. It will be a time of immeasurable persecution. God's people will be pursued, hunted down and slaughtered. Jesus couches this terrible suffering in terms of what it means for the persecuted to flee.

Which is Shortened (v. 22)

It will be such a time of death and destruction that if it had not been shortened, no one would have survived. The clear implication here is that this period is not only a time of suffering brought about by human cause, but also by natural and supernatural activity. Certainly, we will see this in 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation. It is God who cuts those days short. He does so for the sake of the elect, for the sake of those who have been chosen by God for salvation.

A Great Danger (v. 23-26)

In the midst of this great trouble there is a great danger.

²³ Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it.

²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, 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.

Once again, Jesus is shifting weight from the disciples' alarms to His concerns.

There will be false messiahs calling for people to follow them. He warns that these false prophets and fake messiahs will come at a time when they will seem plausible and will be persuasive. Don't believe them. Don't follow them. Take to heart Jesus' warning. There are schemas of last days teaching that set Christian's up for this. Do not listen or heed them.

They will be offering false relief's and deliverances. This is why people will go after them. The trouble will be so great and the teaching so persuasive that people will seek them out and will follow them. I often wonder how much the rise of Near Eastern religions and the resurgence of Islam will contribute to this. Wait, o wait for Jesus' return, my friends.

A Great Contrast (v. 27-28)

But we will endure because we will understand a great contrast.

²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Jesus' coming will be like lightening. It will be sudden, bright, visible, powerful and streaking through the sky.

The false Christs will be like vultures – dark, hulking fowls feeding on the dead and dying carcasses of those who follow after them into the wilderness of apostasy.

The Coming Christ (v. 29-31)

When will Jesus come? What will be the sign of His coming?

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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.

Now, we are used to calling this period of seven years, “the Tribulation”. In my study, this is not Biblically factual. The Bible only refers to the last 3 ½ years as the time of trouble, the time of tribulation or the great tribulation. Out of 17 times the word is used in the New Testament, only 5 directly refer to this period and only 2 use the definite article, “the” in front of it (Matthew 24:29; Revelation 7:14). It is more helpful then to speak of Daniel’s Seventieth week because that is what it is. The last 3 ½ years are the Great Tribulation. This technical detail will help us as we come to other texts teaching about this period of time.

In a Cosmic Collapse (v.29)

Jesus clearly notes the timing of this cosmic collapse. It is *immediately* after the tribulation of those days. He does not say after the tribulation, but after the terrible troubles of those days, that is, the days of the last 3 ½ years.

Just at the end of the age, there will be natural calamities and cosmic disasters. These are given in two sets of two. The sun will be darkened with the moon, possibly as a result, not giving its light. More than likely, this is to be understood as something shielding the sun and moons light from the earth. The stars fall in conjunction with the shaking of the heavenly powers. In other texts, this is sometimes taken fairly literally and sometimes is obviously symbolic. Here, Jesus may well be referring asteroids or something like that.

Two Old Testament texts are clearly being alluded to here. First Isaiah 34:1-4:

¹ Draw near, O nations, to hear, and give attention, O peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that fills it; the world, and all that comes from it. ² For the Lord is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host; he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter. ³ Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. ⁴ All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.

And Ezekiel 32:3-10

³ Thus says the Lord God: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet. ⁴ And I will cast you on the ground; on the open field I will fling you, and will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle on you, and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you. ⁵ I will strew your flesh upon the mountains and fill the valleys with your carcass. ⁶ I will drench the land even to the mountains with your flowing blood, and the ravines will be full of you. ⁷ When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light.

⁸ All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you, and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord God. ⁹ “I will trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries that you have not known. ¹⁰ I will make many peoples appalled at you, and the hair of their kings shall bristle with horror because of you, when I brandish my sword before them. They shall tremble every moment, every one for his own life, on the day of your downfall.

But the most significant are the ones from Joel 2:30-3:3:

³⁰ “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

3 “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, ³ and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

And Joel 3:11-16:

¹¹ Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord. ¹² Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. ¹⁵ The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

¹⁶ The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

By a Heavenly Appearing (v.30)

First, there will appear the sign of the Son of Man, causing universal grief and mourning. Then, there will appear the Son of Man Himself. This text is clearly referring to Daniel 7:13-14 and the triumphant appearing of the final King who rescues His people and destroys all God’s enemies.

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. [Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)]

It will be important to remember this verse as we advance forward. There will appear in heaven “the sign of the Son of Man”. Distinctly, Jesus is pointing to one, single, unmistakable sign that will precede His coming. Then, He will come visibly in triumphant glory and power.

With a Grand Ingathering (v.31)

When Jesus comes, there will be a loud trumpet call. The angels gather up the elect. They will be gathered from all the earth and all the heavens.

Reflect and Respond

Let’s summarize the timeline as Jesus gives it to us. It fits within the one we have proposed from Daniel 7, 9 and 11. It expands on it giving more detail.

The ending of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant both centered around Christ’s first coming.

Jesus’ first coming which includes His death, resurrection and ascension.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as the effect of the end of the Old Covenant.

A period of time during which the gospel is preached over the whole world accompanied by increasing persecution of believers and general moral decline.

A covenant by a Roman/western leader with Israel for 7 years.

Three and one half years into the 7 year period, an event takes place which is an abomination to Israel.

From then till the end, a terrible persecution of believers takes place accompanied by such destruction and death that God cuts it short in order to preserve human life.

At the end of that period of time, there will come cataclysmic events in the heavens including the appearing of the sign of the Son of Man.

Jesus appears in visible and in triumphant glory.

With a trumpet sound, the elect are gathered from the heavens and the earth. Then the end.

Let us heed Jesus’ warning. Yes, we have good information in Jesus’ answers about when these things will happen. But that is not the heart and soul of this message.

A warning: as we come closer to the end of days, as persecution and suffering rise, there will come many false prophets and fake messiahs. Do not listen to them. Do not follow them. They will lead you into apostasy.

An exhortation: hold fast to the faith. No matter how hard it is, no matter how great your suffering, no matter how terrible the persecution, hold fast to Christ. Keep on believing in Him all the way to the end.

¹ This has led to the end times view called Preterism which argues that all these things have already taken place.

² In Daniel, the 3½ years is worded as time, times and half a time.