

- *“More signs of Christ’s return exist today than at any time in history. In Matthew 16:3 Jesus rebuked the people of His day for failing to recognize the “signs of the times” that heralded His first coming. How much more reason do we have today to recognize the signs of His second coming.”* (discoverrevelation.com) This paragraph can be found on a page entitled “Signs of the Times” on the discoveringrevelation.com website. This website is dedicated to the pursuit of deciphering the happenings of today in order to determine that the Lord’s Second return is near. If you watch any sort of national news, specifically Fox News, you have probably seen some of their hosts and guests give grave warnings to Americans that we should make alliances with and protect Israel because of Biblical prophecies that in their minds lead to the importance of Israel in the grand scheme of Jesus’s return. To many the “signs of the times” can point to nothing else than the fact that Jesus is coming back soon!
- But where do people get these supposed signs? Where do they come up with the fact that the end of the age is coming soon? For most of these folks, they turn to **Matthew 24** to find these signs of the end of the age. A couple weeks ago, **Matthew 24** was in our Daily Bible Reading and I haven’t preached on it in a few weeks so I would like for us to consider this chapter this evening & ask some questions from **Matthew 24** concerning the end of the age.

3 Important Questions to Ask About Matthew 24

I. Question: What exactly were the disciples asking?

- A. It is especially important for us to look at this chapter of the New Testament through the eyes of a Jew. Looking at it through the eyes of the Jew greatly helps us to understand the questions of the disciples.
 1. The question was posed to Jesus after He had made a prophecy concerning their great temple. He had said that it would be destroyed.
 2. Right off the bat this would really alarm the disciples because to them the temple was a symbol of their strength, power, and good graces in God’s sight.
 3. If the temple were to be destroyed then that would basically mean that life was over.
- B. So, when they hear these statements of Jesus, they understandably get worried and want to question Jesus further concerning what He has said.
 1. They come to him while on the Mount of Olives and ask Him privately concerning what He has recently said.
 2. They want to know: 1) when these things will happen and 2) what the signs will be for His coming which to them would be the end of all things Jewish.
 3. Their Jew focused minds couldn’t get that there was more to life than just the Jews. Their focus was completely on themselves, the Temple, and Jerusalem.

Answer: When would the Jewish age (in their minds: the world) come to an end?

II. Question: Have the warning signs and events of this chapter already taken place?

- A. Jesus is speaking directly to the disciples and giving them warnings of things that were to come. To them, He gives these signs of warnings that the temple and Jerusalem will be destroyed.
 1. False Christ & prophets will come up deceiving and misleading people. (vv.4,5,23-26)
 2. There will be terrible wars, famines, and earthquakes. (vv.6-8)
 3. There will be great persecution against God’s people. (vv.9-13)
 4. The Gospel will be spread and preached to the entire world. (v.14)
 5. The abomination of desolation will be present. (vv.15-28)
 6. After all of these signs are made evident, God’s judgement would come upon the Jews and they needed to be ready for it. (vv.29-44)
- B. History shows us that these things did in fact take place, during that generation. (v.34)
 1. The book of Acts lists numerous times where false Christ and prophets arose and tried to lead off the people. Theudas is mentioned in **Acts 5:36**. Another man, Judas of Galilee also rose up claiming to be something. (**Acts 5:37**) Secular history tells us that during the administrations of Felix (AD 52-60) there were many cases of imposters rising up and leading people away. Justin Martyr, an early Christian writer, said that Simon Magnus went to Rome and deceived many people there with his magic tricks. He was honored as deity, and was even known as “Simon the holy God”. This all took place during that generation.
 2. Secular history gives us great detail about the turbulent times that faced the people of the first century. There were conflicts all throughout the administrations of Caligula, Claudius, and Nero according to the Jewish Historian Josephus. In fact, Josephus wrote a piece that was entitled, *The Wars of the Jews*. Famines were also a constant during these times. Suetonius, a Roman historian, described the administration of Claudius as characterized by “continual scarcity.” Earthquakes were also devastating during this time. Josephus, Tacitus, and Seneca are all trusted historians who recording such great events during these years. These facts along with Jesus’s words lead us to the fact that these prophecies would shortly come to pass.

3. Secular history isn't necessary for us to know about the terrible persecution that the earliest Christians suffered in the first century. The writings of Luke, Paul, and other inspired writers all tell us of the sufferings of Christians and encouragements to overcome the trials they were facing. History does tell us of the persecutions of the Jews, as well. Historians tell us that the Jews were blamed for many of the issues that faced the Roman empire. They suffered great mistreatment from the Romans.
4. During the 40 years after Jesus's death, the Gospel was spread throughout the known world which would have reached nearly to India, as far south as northern Africa, and as far west and north as Spain, France, and the English Islands. The persecution was beneficial on the front of spreading the Gospel because the Christians went everywhere and they took the Gospel with them. (**Acts 8:4**)
5. The abomination of desolation is generally understood to be the actions of the Roman leader who stood in the Temple where he ought not be as a sign of disrespect towards the Jews and their religion. History tells us that the Temple of the Jews was disgraced and ransacked by the invading Romans.
6. All of these signs preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish life as they knew it. Once these things were taking place, Jesus expected those who listened to Him to flee and find refuge before they too were destroyed. The Romans actually withdrew from their siege for a time and at that time, many Christians took off knowing the words that Jesus had spoken so many years ago. Possible prophecy of this in **vv.21,22**.

Answer: Yes, the warning signs took place in the first century, and judgement was brought down against Jerusalem in 70AD at the hands of the Romans.

III. Question: Based upon the evidence, is Jesus predicting final judgement or Jewish Judgement in Matthew 24?

- A. This is where things get a little tricky and unclear. Because of this, there are a few different ways to look at how the words of Jesus are structured in this chapter.
 1. As stated earlier, some see this chapter as point completely to Jesus's second coming. Hopefully, we have seen that this isn't an appropriate reading of this chapter.
 2. Others see this chapter as being mostly the destruction of Jerusalem with Jesus changing subjects somewhere in the middle of the chapter at either v. 29, some v.35, and even others say that Jesus switched back and forth between the two different events.
 3. And then still others would say that Jesus is dealing nearly exclusively with the destruction of Jerusalem since that was the question that was specifically asked to Him, yet also giving some implications of the final judgement.
- B. My mind has changed somewhat throughout my study of this chapter. I am becoming more convinced that Jesus's primary focus throughout the entirety of the chapter is on the destruction of Jerusalem, but that there are very heavy implications to the final judgement.
 1. Jesus is giving all of these warnings to the disciples and those who would read just after this so they would know to escape from the terrible things that were to come.
 2. **Vv. 15-20** are especially specific concerning what Jesus wanted them to do. When they saw the signs, they were to take off. If this were the final judgement, then what good would going to the mountains do them?
 3. **Vv. 35-42** have been some of the most challenging for me in trying to figure out exactly what Jesus is alluding to. I have always thought that this was the transition, but it is very possible that Jesus still could be speaking to the destruction of Jerusalem. As a man, Jesus was somewhat limited with His divine qualities. Maybe this was one of the things that was limited to Him. He didn't know the exact time when this would happen, but He was able to give them the signs of these things that were to come. The Jerusalem focus would also explain the talk of one being taken and another left. Many Jews were captured by the Romans and killed in many vicious ways. Or it could allude to the one that heeded Jesus's warnings and took off. It becomes much more difficult to understand those verses if it is pointing to final judgement.
 4. Both views have strength and weaknesses, but it is our duty to test all things and come to the most logical conclusion based upon our study and understanding.

Answer: Jesus's main focus is on the destruction of the Jews & Jerusalem. It would happen during that generation. (v.34)

Conclusion: Take Aways from Our Study:

- A. We need to make sure that we are not trying to take ancient writings and read them through 21st century lenses.
- B. Jesus said that these things would take place during that generation. That makes sense when we consider that Jerusalem and Judaism were attacked and destroyed just 40 years later.
- C. While that destruction has taken place, we should not let our guard down because there is a final judgement that we will all face. We, like the Jews of the first century, must always be ready and prepared for that final judgement by being busy for our Lord and glorifying Him in all things.
- D. Peter's words ring very true for us, today. *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be: holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."* (II Peter 3:10-14)