

“What will be the Sign of Your Coming?”

Thomas Robinson, *Matthew–Conflict and Vision 3*, February 14, 2016

Matthew 24:1-36 (Cf Mk 13; Lk 21)

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/royal presence** (*parousia*) and of the **completion of the age?**”

Beginning the Pains of Giving Birth

⁴ And Jesus answered them, “**See that no one leads you astray.** ⁵ For **many will come** in my name, saying, ‘**I am the Messiah,**’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of **wars** and rumors of wars. See that you are **not alarmed**, for it must happen, but **the end/goal 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.**

⁹ Then they will **deliver you up to distress/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. ¹⁴ And this **good news of the kingdom** will be **proclaimed** throughout the **whole inhabited world** as a testimony to **all the nations/Gentiles**, and then **the end/goal will come.**

Abomination of Desolation

¹⁵ When, therefore, **you see ‘the abomination of desolation’** spoken of by the prophet **Daniel** [11:31], standing in a **holy place** (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let **those in Judea** flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let the one **on the housetop** not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let **the one 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 distress/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, all flesh would not be saved. But because of the chosen ones those days will be cut short.

²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, **here is the Messiah!**’ or ‘There he is!’ **do not believe it.** ²⁴ For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. ²⁵ See, **I have told you beforehand.**

²⁶ If, therefore, 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. ²⁷ For as the **lightning** comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be **the presence** (*Parousia*) **of the Son of Man.** ²⁸ Wherever the **corpse** is, there the **eagles/vultures** will gather.

Mysterious Sign that Can’t be Missed

²⁹ Immediately after the **distress/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.* [Isa 13:10; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Acts 2:20] 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 [Dan 7:13]. ³¹ And he will send out his **messengers/angels** with a loud trumpet call, and they will **gather his chosen** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

³² From the **fig tree** learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, **when you see all these things**, you know that **he is near**, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until **all these things take place.** ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but **my words will not pass away.** ³⁶ But concerning **that day and hour no one knows**, not even **the angels** of heaven, **nor the Son**, but **the Father only.**”

2 Peter 3:8

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Acts 2:16

¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ... ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

Listening to Jesus with the Disciples

A dramatic moment when Jesus leaves the Temple after prophetic confrontation with all that it stood for in that day from the sell-out of the Sadducees to the violence of the Zealots to the law focus of the Pharisees. The disciples see marvelous buildings; Jesus sees impending destruction.

The disciples ask three questions: (1) When will that destruction come? (2) What sign will show Jesus' *parousia* – presence as king – and (3) the completion of the age (start of a new age)?

It's hard for us to put ourselves in the place of the disciples listening to Jesus. They hadn't seen the crucifixion, didn't know about the resurrection or ascension, had no idea of a second coming or centuries of church history. They knew the temple and were hoping for Jesus as king of Israel. Jesus speaks to them in a way that is meaningful to them. Matthew records this after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in a.d. 70. We hear it from our much later perspective.

Parousia doesn't mean second coming but Jesus' presence as King and messianic vindication.

Tribulation is not an "end-time" period but the sufferings of God's people. The "end" (*telos*) is not the end of the universe but the world-changing end of one age and beginning of another.

Deception and Thinking You Know More than You Do

The first thing Jesus says is to watch out for deception. People want answers and are often willing to believe anyone who speaks with confidence. Jesus repeats the warning (vv 4-5, 11, 23-26, 36). Most emphatically at the end of this text: not even Jesus knows, only the Father. Anyone who believes they have figured out the timetable is fooling themselves. (Harold Camping 5/21/2011).

Jesus talks to his disciples in their concern about the destruction of the Temple. That's a very old historical fact for us. For them it was a sign of the collapse of everything they cared about. If Jesus doesn't show himself as Messiah by renewing the Temple, how can he do it?

Jesus' prediction is not comforting. The coming of the new age will be painful like childbirth. All the old evils of war and famine. New ones of persecution, alienation, betrayal. Endurance is needed.

But Jesus' Kingdom will be proclaimed in all nations as good news for all – that's the end-goal.

Looking Back to Look Forward

When Jesus turns to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem more specifically, he reaches back to symbols from Daniel: an "abomination of desolation" set up in the temple. Matthew believes his readers will know what this means. Jesus tells his disciples not to join in the violence but to get away from the city. This will be the vindication of his prophetic condemnation of the leaders of the temple and Jerusalem. They did not know the way of peace. Don't look for special appearances or signs; just the sign of the events themselves – eagles circling a dead body.

Jesus uses classic prophetic words of cosmic signs in sun and moon: these will be truly earth-changing events. The word that the disciples take out to the world will be the work of God's messengers/angels calling and gathering people from the four winds (not rapture). They themselves will see it. But the story is open-ended. Only the Father knows the absolute climax.