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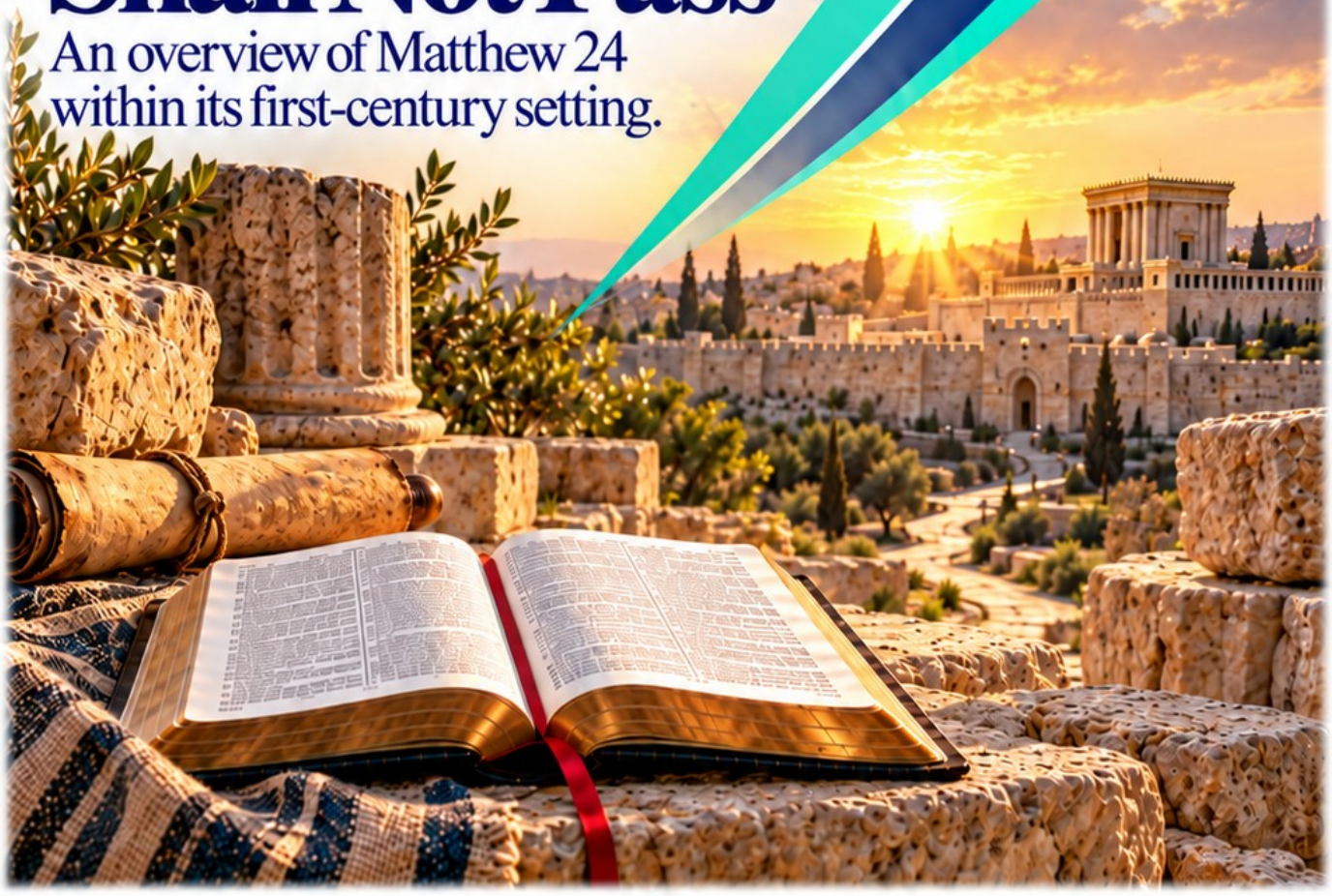
STUDY GUIDE
63

The Coming of Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 2 OF 6:

This Generation Shall Not Pass

An overview of Matthew 24
within its first-century setting.



Equipping and empowering for effective service
2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

Content

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION: TO WHOM WAS JESUS SPEAKING?

ALL THESE THINGS SHALL COME UPON THIS GENERATION

BEHOLD, YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE

THERE SHALL NOT BE LEFT HERE ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER

TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?

WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY COMING AND OF THE END OF THE AGE?

TAKE HEED THAT NO MAN DECEIVE YOU

THEN SHALL BE GREAT TRIBULATION

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS

CONCLUSION: THE GENERATION JESUS IDENTIFIED

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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Windows: Ctrl + F | Mac: Cmd + F | Phone or tablet: use Search in your PDF reader.

PREFACE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew 23 and 24 has often been separated from the people He was addressing and interpreted as though its fulfilment belongs to a distant future. Many Christians have consequently been taught to expect another physical coming of Jesus Christ, a future worldwide tribulation and the destruction of the present world. Yet Jesus spoke to people living in the first century and established a definite timeframe for the events He foretold.

Before leaving the Temple, Jesus confronted the religious leaders of Jerusalem and announced the judgement that would come upon their generation. He then declared that their house would be left desolate and foretold the destruction of the Temple. These declarations provide the historical foundation for understanding the questions His disciples subsequently asked concerning the Temple, His coming and the end of the age.

Jesus declared in **Matthew 23:36**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

This declaration must remain central to our understanding. Jesus identified the generation then living rather than an unknown generation thousands of years later. His words establish the audience, historical setting and timeframe within which the prophecy must be understood.

This Study Guide examines the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. We will consider Jesus' warnings concerning deception, persecution, the proclamation of the Gospel and the great tribulation. We will also examine the prophetic language of the darkened sun, moon and stars according to the principles established by Scripture.

Jesus Christ fulfilled His promised coming at Pentecost in A.D. 31 when He came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The New Covenant reality was already established through His completed saving work and His indwelling presence. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 was a distinct event that brought the visible Temple-centred former covenant order to its historical end.

The former covenant age means the Old Covenant age, when Israel lived under the Law of Moses. The New Covenant age is the Gospel Day, in which Jesus Christ dwells within those who are born again. The Temple and its ceremonies continued for a time, but the Old Covenant did not remain in force alongside the New Covenant.

The historical fulfilment of prophecy does not remove its continuing spiritual instruction. Jesus' warnings concerning discernment, endurance and faithfulness remain important throughout the Gospel Day. These qualities are not produced through human effort alone but through the life of Jesus Christ dwelling within everyone who is born again.

Our purpose is to understand the prophecy within the audience, setting and timeframe Jesus Himself established, and to recognise the certainty of His fulfilled promises.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do Jesus' audience and timeframe matter when reading Matthew 23 and 24?

Personal Reflection

Has an alarming prediction troubled you because you overlooked the people and generation Jesus originally addressed?

Action Step

Identify one claim that has caused fear. Explain how you will examine Matthew 23–24 before accepting it, and what will change in the way you respond to alarming reports.

INTRODUCTION: TO WHOM WAS JESUS SPEAKING?

BACK TO CONTENTS

Before we can correctly understand the prophecy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24, we must identify the people He was addressing and the circumstances that led to His declarations. Jesus spoke to people living during His earthly ministry, and His words established a definite historical setting. We must not remove His prophecy from that setting and transfer its fulfilment to another generation thousands of years later.

The conversation did not begin on the Mount of Olives. Matthew 23 records Jesus confronting the religious leaders of Jerusalem, exposing their rejection of God's messengers and announcing the judgement that would come upon their generation. His declarations provide the setting for everything that follows.

Jesus declared in **Matthew 23:36-38**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*

Jesus identified the generation and pronounced desolation upon their house. He was speaking directly to people then living and declaring the judgement that would come upon them. He then departed from the Temple, and His disciples drew His attention to its buildings.

The Temple Prophecy Prompted Their Questions

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 24:1-3**:

> *"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

The sequence is important. Jesus had just declared that their house would be left desolate, and He now foretold the destruction of the Temple buildings standing before them. The disciples' questions arose directly from these declarations.

Their questions must therefore be understood within the historical and covenant setting that produced them. They were not introducing an unrelated enquiry concerning the destruction of the physical universe thousands of years later. They were asking about the events Jesus had just placed before them.

Jesus Christ fulfilled His promised coming at Pentecost in A.D. 31, bringing His indwelling life into the experience of His people. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 came later within the same generation. That destruction brought the visible Temple-centred former covenant order to its historical end after the New Covenant reality had already been established in Jesus Christ.

With the original audience and historical setting established, we can now examine the declaration that governs the teaching which follows. Jesus had already identified both the people and the timeframe: *"All these things shall come upon this generation."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Temple setting explain the disciples' questions in Matthew 24?

Personal Reflection

Do you read Matthew 24 through a familiar modern prediction before considering the Temple that Jesus and His disciples could see?

Action Step

Choose one interpretation you have assumed. Explain how returning to the Temple setting will change the way you examine or repeat that teaching.

ALL THESE THINGS SHALL COME UPON THIS GENERATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Before Jesus spoke about the destruction of the Temple in Matthew 24, He had already identified the generation upon whom judgement would come. Matthew 23 records a direct confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem, and the language of the chapter repeatedly addresses the people then standing before Him. The words that follow are therefore essential to understanding the timeframe of Matthew 24.

Jesus was not speaking about an unidentified generation thousands of years in the future. He was speaking to religious leaders who honoured the memory of the prophets while continuing the same spirit of rejection that had opposed God's messengers before them. Their own conduct would become part of the judgement Jesus was announcing.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:29-32**:

> *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers."*

Their outward respect for the prophets did not prove that they possessed the same spirit of obedience as the prophets. Jesus exposed the contradiction between their profession and

their conduct. They condemned what their fathers had done while resisting the truth God was placing before them through Jesus Christ.

The Measure Was Being Filled

Jesus then spoke with increasing seriousness about the judgement that would come upon that generation. The expression *"Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers"* shows that something was reaching its appointed fullness. Their continuing rejection would bring the matter to its conclusion.

Jesus continued in **Matthew 23:33-35**:

> *"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."*

Notice the direct language: *"I send unto you"* and *"upon you may come."* Jesus was speaking to people then living and telling them what would happen as God's messengers continued to be rejected. His words concerned events that would unfold within the generation standing before Him.

This also prepares us to understand the book of Acts. After Pentecost, the apostles and other believers preached Jesus Christ, and many suffered persecution because of that testimony. The events recorded in Acts therefore belong naturally within the setting Jesus had already described.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Jesus' direct address identify the people upon whom judgement would come?

Personal Reflection

Can loyalty to a respected religious teacher make you defensive when Jesus' words challenge a belief you hold?

Action Step

Identify a teaching you have hesitated to examine. Explain how you will listen with humility and submit the belief to God's Word rather than defending its source.

Jesus Identified the Generation

Jesus then gave one of the most important statements for understanding everything that follows. He did not leave the identity of the generation open or undefined. He spoke directly to those before Him and identified when the announced judgement would come.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:36**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

The words are direct. Jesus said *"this generation,"* not a generation in the distant future or a generation living thousands of years later. He said that *"all these things"* would come upon the generation then living.

This declaration must remain within its historical setting. Jesus was speaking to the people then present, and He identified their generation as the generation upon whom the judgement He had described would come. That timeframe had already been established before He left the Temple.

This becomes especially important when we reach Matthew 24 because Jesus later repeats the same expression.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:34**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*

The expressions in Matthew 23 and Matthew 24 correspond directly. Jesus first said *"All these things shall come upon this generation,"* and later said *"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."* Matthew 24 cannot therefore be separated from the timeframe Jesus established in Matthew 23.

The same generation is identified in both statements. The judgement announced in Matthew 23 and the fulfilment described in Matthew 24 belong within the same continuing teaching. Jesus had established the timeframe before the disciples asked their questions.

Judgement Was Preceded by Mercy

The severity of Jesus' words must not cause us to overlook His compassion. Immediately after pronouncing judgement, Jesus revealed His desire to gather the people of Jerusalem to Himself. His judgement followed continued rejection, not an absence of mercy.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:37**:

> *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"*

Jesus desired to gather them. The coming judgement was not evidence that He had withheld mercy from them. The words *"how often would I have gathered thy children together"* reveal His desire, while *"ye would not"* identifies their rejection.

This also gives continuing instruction to believers throughout the Gospel Day. God's judgement is righteous, but His call to repentance must never be forgotten. The first-century fulfilment belonged to that generation, while the warning against rejecting God's truth continues to instruct us.

"Your House Is Left Unto You Desolate"

Jesus then brought the warning directly to their house. His next words form an important transition from the judgement announced in Matthew 23 to the Temple prophecy that follows in Matthew 24. The two chapters belong to one continuing setting.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:38-39**:

> *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

"Blessed Is He That Cometh in the Name of the Lord"

Jesus did not end His statement with the declaration that their house would be left desolate. He continued by saying that they would not see Him again until they said, *"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."* These words come directly from Psalm 118 and point to the One whom the builders rejected.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 118:22**:

> *"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner."*

The Psalmist then wrote in **Psalm 118:26**:

> *"Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD."*

The rejected stone is Jesus Christ. The religious leaders rejected Him, yet He became the Head of the New Covenant people of God. The One they refused was the One in whom God's purpose would be fulfilled.

These words point forward to the Gospel Day. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood and proclaimed Jesus Christ to the people in Jerusalem. From that day onward, the Gospel was carried by those sent in His name, calling people to receive the One whom the builders had rejected.

Paul wrote in **Romans 10:15**:

> *"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"*

Through the preaching of the Gospel, people were confronted again with Jesus Christ. Those who received the Gospel received the One who had come in the name of the Lord and were brought into the New Covenant reality found in Him. Those who refused remained outside that reality through unbelief.

Matthew 23:39 therefore points beyond the rejection taking place before the cross to the Gospel witness that began at Pentecost. Christ had been rejected, but through the Gospel He continued to be presented to that same generation as the fulfilment of God's promise. The rejected stone had become the Head, and people were now being called to receive Him.

Matthew 23 Leads Directly Into Matthew 24

The words *"your house"* lead directly into what happens next. Jesus departed from the Temple, and His disciples immediately drew His attention to its buildings. Matthew 23 does not finish one unrelated subject so that Matthew 24 can begin another.

Jesus had just pronounced desolation upon their house, and then He walked out of the Temple. The disciples showed Him the Temple buildings, and Jesus told them that not one

stone would be left upon another. Their questions in Matthew 24 arose directly from what He had just declared.

The prophecy of Matthew 24 therefore begins with a timeframe already established as *"this generation."* It begins with a judgement already announced in the words *"your house is left unto you desolate."* It also begins with people who had just heard Jesus say that *"all these things"* would come upon them.

This is why we must begin Matthew 24 in Matthew 23. Jesus had already told us who He was speaking to and when the judgement would fall. The next step is to examine His solemn declaration, *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do **Matthew 23:36** *and* **Matthew 24:34** *establish one generation for fulfilment?*

Personal Reflection

When Christ corrects you, do you notice His desire to gather people as well as His warning against unbelief?

Action Step

Identify one area of resistance in your response to correction. Explain how you will receive His Word with repentance and trust rather than justifying yourself.

BEHOLD, YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Jesus had identified the generation upon whom judgement would come. He then turned His attention directly towards Jerusalem and the house that stood at the centre of its religious life. His words were solemn because the Temple had long been associated with the worship of God under the former covenant, yet the people had rejected the One to whom that covenant pointed.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:37-38**:

> *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*

Notice the change in the language. Jesus desired to gather them, but they refused. He then declared, *"your house is left unto you desolate."* The judgement that had been announced upon that generation was now brought directly to the house that stood at the centre of their religious life.

From "My House" to "Your House"

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had spoken of the Temple as God's house. His words showed the purpose for which that house had been appointed, while also condemning what the people had made of it.

Jesus said in **Matthew 21:13**:

> *"And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."*

At that time Jesus called it *"My house."* Yet in Matthew 23, after exposing the hypocrisy and rejection of the religious leaders, He said, *"your house is left unto you desolate."* The change in expression belongs within the judgement Jesus was pronouncing upon Jerusalem and its religious leadership.

A House Is a Dwelling Place

The word *"house"* carries the thought of a dwelling place. Under the former covenant, the Temple stood as the visible house associated with the presence and worship of God among Israel. It was therefore far more significant than an impressive religious building because it stood at the centre of that covenant order.

When Jesus said, *"your house is left unto you desolate,"* He was declaring something deeper than the future destruction of its stones. The building could remain standing while the spiritual reality to which it had pointed was no longer centred there. Its continued physical existence did not mean that it still held the same covenant place.

Jesus Christ was the reality towards which the former shadows pointed. Through His completed work, those shadows reached their fulfilment, and at Pentecost God came to dwell within His born-again people by His Spirit. The dwelling place of God under the New Covenant was therefore found in His people through the indwelling Christ.

The Temple remained physically visible for a generation, but it could no longer define where God dwelt with His New Covenant people. What had once represented His presence had become an outward structure in comparison with the living reality now found in Jesus Christ. God now dwells within His people by His Spirit, and the Person is greater than the former representation.

The Temple building had not yet been destroyed. Its walls were still standing, sacrifices were still being offered, priests were still serving and people were still gathering there. Nevertheless, Jesus pronounced the house desolate before its physical destruction occurred.

This distinction is important. A religious structure can continue outwardly after the spiritual reality to which it once belonged has reached its fulfilment. The Temple would remain standing for a period of time, but Jesus had already declared the judgement that was coming upon it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why could Jesus call the Temple desolate while its buildings still stood?

Personal Reflection

Do a religious building, a routine or an organisation sometimes provide more reassurance to you than Christ Himself?

Action Step

Name the outward thing upon which you depend. Explain how you will redirect your confidence towards Jesus Christ, the spiritual reality to whom the former Temple pointed.

The Temple Stood at the Centre of the Former Covenant Order

The Temple was much more than an impressive building. It stood at the centre of the worship, sacrifices, priesthood and ceremonies connected with the former covenant. To the disciples and to the Jewish people generally, its destruction would therefore represent an enormous change.

The Temple had served an appointed purpose, but its sacrifices and ceremonies pointed forward to Jesus Christ. The reality was not found permanently in the building, the altar or the repeated sacrifices. The reality was found in the Person to whom those things pointed.

Jesus had already prepared His hearers for a change in the place and nature of worship. The physical location of Jerusalem would no longer define where true worship must take place. Worship in the New Covenant would be in spirit and in truth.

Jesus said in **John 4:21-24**:

> *"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

Jesus said that true worship would no longer be centred upon Jerusalem as a physical location. The time had come for worship in spirit and in truth. The Temple would continue standing for a time, but it would no longer hold the place it had occupied under the former covenant.

Jesus Departed From the Temple

Matthew then records what happened immediately after Jesus pronounced the house desolate. His departure from the Temple leads directly into the events recorded at the beginning of Matthew 24. The sequence should be followed without separating the two chapters into unrelated subjects.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:1**:

> *"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple."*

Jesus had just said *"your house is left unto you desolate,"* and then *"Jesus went out, and departed from the temple."* Matthew 24 therefore continues directly from the judgement pronounced in Matthew 23. The chapter division does not interrupt the setting or begin an unrelated subject.

The disciples then drew Jesus' attention to the Temple buildings. Their response is understandable because the Temple was magnificent, deeply connected with their history and central to the religious life they had always known. Jesus answered by telling them what would happen to the buildings they were showing Him.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:2**:

> *"And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

The desolation announced in Matthew 23 was now connected directly with the destruction of the Temple. Jesus had declared their house desolate, departed from it, and then foretold the complete destruction of the buildings before His disciples.

The New Covenant Did Not Wait Until A.D. 70

We must also keep an important distinction clear. The destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 did not begin the New Covenant, and Jesus did not have to wait until the stones of the Temple were thrown down before His people could enter the New Covenant reality. The physical destruction of the Temple came later than the spiritual reality established through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The Gospel Day had begun, and the reality to which the former covenant shadows pointed had come. God's people were now living in the New Covenant reality of Christ dwelling within them.

The Temple remained standing during the years that followed, but its continued physical existence did not mean that the former covenant reality continued unchanged. God permitted a period of transition while the Gospel went forth and people were called into the fulfilled reality found in Jesus Christ. The continued presence of the building did not reverse what Christ had already accomplished.

The physical destruction came later, within the same generation Jesus had identified. It brought the visible Temple-centred former covenant order to its historical end. The judgement Jesus had announced in Matthew 23 was therefore brought to its visible historical fulfilment within that generation.

The sequence is clear. Jesus declared *"your house is left unto you desolate,"* departed from the Temple, and then heard His disciples draw attention to its buildings. He responded by foretelling their complete destruction, giving the disciples an obvious reason to ask what would happen next.

If this great Temple was going to be destroyed, they naturally wanted to know when these things would happen. That question now leads directly into the words they asked Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did the New Covenant not wait for the Temple's destruction in A.D. 70?

Personal Reflection

Does your worship depend too strongly on a location, ceremony or outward arrangement?

Action Step

Identify one expectation that needs to change. Describe how you will worship in spirit and truth through Christ's indwelling life, rather than depending upon an outward place.

THERE SHALL NOT BE LEFT HERE ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER

BACK TO CONTENTS

After Jesus declared, *"your house is left unto you desolate,"* He left the Temple. His disciples then drew His attention to the buildings they had known throughout their lives. What Jesus said next gave them the immediate reason for the questions they would soon ask on the Mount of Olives.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:1-2**:

> *"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

Jesus was speaking about the Temple standing before them. The words *"here"* and *"these things"* belong directly to that physical setting. The disciples could see the buildings, and Jesus told them plainly that those buildings would be destroyed.

The Disciples Were Looking at the Temple

Mark records the same event and gives us additional detail concerning the disciples' reaction. They were not discussing an unseen structure or asking about something far removed from their own time. Their attention was fixed upon the great Temple buildings standing before them.

Mark wrote in **Mark 13:1-2**:

> *"And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

The disciples were impressed by what they saw. The stones were great, the buildings were magnificent, and the Temple appeared permanent. Yet Jesus told them that the entire structure they were admiring would be thrown down.

Luke records the same prophecy and again places the emphasis upon what the disciples could actually see.

Luke wrote in **Luke 21:5-6**:

> *"And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*

Jesus directed their attention to *"these things which ye behold."* The prophecy concerned something visible before their eyes. This historical setting must remain in place when His words are interpreted.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Matthew, Mark and Luke identify the buildings Jesus said would be destroyed?

Personal Reflection

Has the impressive appearance of a minister, church building or religious movement ever caused you to overlook the words of Jesus?

Action Step

Identify a claim you need to reconsider. Explain how you will place the Lord's words above its outward appearance before accepting it.

The Destruction Was Connected With Jerusalem

The parallel account in Luke makes the historical setting even clearer. Jesus later told His disciples what they would see when Jerusalem's desolation drew near. He named the city, identified the surrounding region and gave instructions to those who would be living there.

Jesus said in **Luke 21:20-22**:

> *"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."*

Jesus named Jerusalem and spoke directly about Judaea. He told those living there what to do when they saw the city surrounded by armies. These are geographical and historical details belonging to the people living in that land and to the generation Jesus had already identified.

The prophecy was therefore anchored in a real place and a real historical situation. Jesus was preparing His disciples for events that would affect Jerusalem and the Temple within their generation. The destruction He foretold was not detached from the city standing before them.

The Temple Could Not Preserve Them

The religious leaders placed great confidence in the Temple, but the presence of a religious building could not protect people who rejected the truth of God. Jesus had already exposed the danger of trusting outward religion while refusing the righteousness, mercy and truth God required. The magnificence of the Temple could not overturn the judgement He had announced.

The Temple had a genuine place in God's former covenant purpose, but the building itself could never replace obedience to God. Its sacrifices, priesthood and ceremonies pointed forward to Jesus Christ. The reality towards which they pointed had now come in Him.

The writer of Hebrews explains that the former covenant contained shadows that could not provide the final reality.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:1**:

> *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."*

The Temple order belonged to that former covenant arrangement. Its sacrifices and ceremonies had an appointed purpose, but they pointed beyond themselves to Jesus Christ. The fulfilment was found in the Person, not in the continued existence of the building.

What Jesus Foretold Came to Pass Within That Generation

Jesus did not leave the timeframe open. He had already said in Matthew 23 that judgement would come upon *"this generation,"* and He would later declare that the generation would not pass until *"all these things"* were fulfilled. His prophecy concerning the Temple belongs within that same timeframe.

The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, within the generation Jesus addressed. The physical building that had seemed so permanent came down as He had foretold. What His disciples were admiring would not survive the judgement He had announced.

This fulfilment gives us a clear historical setting for understanding the disciples' questions. Their questions arose directly from what Jesus had said about Jerusalem and the Temple. They had just heard Jesus say that the buildings before them would be completely destroyed.

The prophecy began with what they could see: Jerusalem, the Temple, its great buildings and the stones that would be thrown down. The disciples naturally wanted to know when this destruction would happen and what signs would accompany the events Jesus had described. Their questions arose directly from His prophecy concerning the Temple.

Matthew therefore continues in **Matthew 24:3**:

> *"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

The disciples' questions must be heard within the setting that produced them. Jesus had just foretold the destruction of the Temple standing before them, and they wanted to know when *"these things"* would take place. We must therefore understand their questions within that setting before attempting to answer them.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Luke's reference to Jerusalem explain the Temple prophecy?

Personal Reflection

Where might confidence in religious connections prevent you from examining whether you truly belong to Christ?

Action Step

Identify one reliance that needs to be corrected. Explain the personal response you will make to Jesus Christ rather than trusting outward association.

TELL US, WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?

BACK TO CONTENTS

The disciples had heard Jesus pronounce judgement upon Jerusalem, declare that their house would be left desolate and foretell the complete destruction of the Temple. They had also stood beside Him while looking at the buildings He said would be thrown down. Their questions on the Mount of Olives therefore arose directly from what Jesus had just told them.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:3**:

> *"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

The first words of their question are important: *"When shall these things be?"* The expression *"these things"* must be understood from what Jesus had just said. He had told them that the Temple buildings before their eyes would be destroyed, so the disciples wanted to know when the events He had just described would take place.

The Question Came From What They Had Just Heard

Mark records the same conversation and identifies some of the disciples who asked Jesus privately. His account keeps their question connected directly with the Temple prophecy they had just heard.

Mark wrote in **Mark 13:3-4**:

> *"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"*

Notice again the expression *"when all these things shall be fulfilled?"* They were not asking Jesus to describe an unrelated series of events thousands of years beyond their lifetime. They were asking about the things He had just foretold concerning the Temple and Jerusalem.

Luke records the same first question.

Luke wrote in **Luke 21:7**:

> *"And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?"*

Matthew, Mark and Luke therefore preserve the same historical setting. The disciples wanted to know when the things Jesus had just announced would happen and what signs would indicate that their fulfilment was approaching. Their questions must remain connected with the prophecy that caused them to ask.

Jesus Was Answering His Own Disciples

We must keep the audience before us as Jesus begins His answer. Matthew says that *"the disciples came unto him privately,"* while Mark names Peter, James, John and Andrew. These were real men sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives while the Temple remained visible nearby.

Jesus therefore began His answer by speaking directly to them.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:4-6**:

> *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."*

Jesus said *"Take heed that no man deceive you"* and *"ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars."* These words were addressed first to the disciples sitting before Him. He was preparing them for events they would encounter during the period leading towards the fulfilment He had foretold.

Believers today can still learn from His warning. We should guard ourselves against deception and refuse to be troubled by alarming events. However, the continuing spiritual principle must not be used to remove Jesus' prophecy from the people to whom He originally gave it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What were the disciples asking when they said 'when shall these things be'?

Personal Reflection

How do frightening reports affect the way you speak to others about Jesus' coming and the future?

Action Step

Choose one kind of report that unsettles you. Explain how you will check it against Jesus' original audience and answer without spreading fear.

The Timeframe Had Already Been Given

The disciples asked when, but Jesus had already given them an important part of the answer before they reached the Mount of Olives. In Matthew 23 He had identified the generation upon whom the announced judgement would come. Later in Matthew 24 He would repeat the same timeframe.

Jesus had said in **Matthew 23:36**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

Later in the same teaching Jesus said in **Matthew 24:34**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*

These two statements place clear boundaries around the prophecy. Before leaving the Temple, Jesus said *"All these things shall come upon this generation,"* and after describing what would occur, He said *"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."* The answer to *"When shall these things be?"* therefore remains within the generation Jesus identified.

"All These Things" Must Remain Together

The repeated expression *"all these things"* is also important. Jesus did not say that one small part would occur within that generation while the remainder would be postponed for thousands of years. The language of both the question and the answer keeps the events together.

Mark records the disciples asking when *"all these things shall be fulfilled."* Matthew later records Jesus saying that the generation would not pass until *"all these things be fulfilled."* The wording of the question and the wording of the answer correspond directly.

This gives us a clear principle for interpreting everything that follows. Whatever meaning is given to the signs, the tribulation, the prophetic imagery, the coming of the Son of man, the fig tree and the other warnings of Matthew 24, that understanding must agree with the timeframe Jesus Himself gave. *"All these things"* must remain within the generation He identified.

The First Question Establishes the Historical Setting

The question *"When shall these things be?"* anchors the teaching in the first century. The disciples were looking at the Temple, Jesus foretold its destruction, and they asked when it would happen. Jesus then spoke directly to them about what they would hear, see and experience before declaring that their generation would not pass until all these things were fulfilled.

This does not remove the spiritual value of Matthew 24 for believers today. Its principles concerning discernment, faithfulness, endurance and watchfulness continue to instruct us throughout the Gospel Day. Those continuing principles, however, must remain distinguished from the historical prophecy itself.

The first question establishes the setting in which the rest of the teaching must be understood. The disciples wanted to know when the events Jesus had just foretold would happen, and Jesus answered within the timeframe of *"this generation."* Having established the question of when, we can now examine the other matters they raised: What would be the sign of His coming, and what would mark the end of the age?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must 'all these things' remain within the timeframe Jesus gave?

Personal Reflection

Which familiar expectation about Matthew 24 becomes difficult to maintain when you keep 'all these things' within Jesus' generation?

Action Step

State the expectation and the relevant verses. Explain what belief or habit of interpreting prophecy you will change as a result.

WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY COMING AND OF THE END OF THE AGE?

BACK TO CONTENTS

The disciples did not ask only when the Temple would be destroyed. Matthew records that they also asked Jesus about His coming and what the King James Version calls *"the end of the world."* These matters belong to the same conversation and must be understood within the historical setting Jesus had already established.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:3**:

> *"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

The disciples were asking about closely connected matters. They wanted to know when the things Jesus had foretold would occur, what would indicate His coming and what would mark the end of the age in which they were then living. We must not read the word *"world"* in the King James Version and immediately conclude that the disciples were asking when planet Earth would cease to exist.

The Disciples Were Still Thinking Naturally

We must also remember that the disciples did not yet understand everything Jesus was teaching from a fully developed New Covenant perspective. Their questions were sincere, but they were still capable of thinking in natural terms concerning Israel, the Kingdom and the fulfilment of prophecy. Their expectations therefore cannot be allowed to determine the meaning of the answers Jesus gave them.

This becomes especially clear after the resurrection of Jesus.

Luke wrote in **Acts 1:6**:

> *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"*

Even at that late stage, the disciples were still asking whether Jesus would restore a kingdom to natural Israel. Their question shows that they had not yet fully understood the spiritual nature of the Kingdom that would be revealed through the New Covenant. They were still

capable of interpreting God's purpose through expectations connected with the natural nation they had always known.

This is important when we return to Matthew 24. We should not assume that every expectation contained in the disciples' thinking was itself the correct interpretation of what Jesus would do. They asked the questions, but Jesus supplied the answers, and His words must determine the meaning.

Their natural expectations did not determine the meaning of His coming. They did not turn the end of the AION into the destruction of the physical universe, nor did they require the Kingdom to be restored as a natural Jewish nation. Jesus would bring them from natural expectation into spiritual understanding.

His coming would be fulfilled at Pentecost when He came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The Kingdom would be experienced in the New Covenant reality found in Jesus Christ rather than through the restoration of a natural political kingdom. The disciples themselves would come to understand this more fully as that reality became their experience.

We must therefore allow the words of Jesus and the later New Testament revelation to interpret the disciples' questions. Their incomplete expectations must not be allowed to control the meaning of His teaching. Jesus supplied the answers, and His words must govern our understanding.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did the disciples' natural expectations differ from the Kingdom Jesus established?

Personal Reflection

Are you waiting for an outward political Kingdom rather than recognising Christ's reign in the lives of His people now?

Action Step

Identify an expectation or priority that needs correction. Explain how you will respond to Christ as King in a decision you are facing today.

"World" Here Means "Age"

The Greek word translated *"world"* in **Matthew 24:3** is AION. It refers to an age or period of time. It is not the Greek word KOSMOS, which can refer to the world or its inhabitants.

This distinction is important because the disciples were living during a great covenant change. Jesus Christ had come in fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, His sacrifice was approaching, and the former covenant order centred upon the Temple was moving towards its appointed conclusion. Their question concerned *"the end of the AION,"* the end of the age, not the destruction of the physical planet.

Understanding AION keeps their question within the covenant and historical setting already established by Jesus. They had just heard Him pronounce judgement upon Jerusalem and foretell the destruction of the Temple. Their question concerning the end of the age belonged naturally within that same setting.

Jesus Corrected Their Natural Expectations

Although the disciples were asking Jesus sincere questions, they did not yet fully understand the spiritual nature of the Kingdom or the covenant change that was approaching. Even after His resurrection, they were still capable of thinking in terms of the restoration of a natural kingdom to Israel. Their understanding was still developing as Jesus prepared them for the New Covenant reality that would soon become their experience.

Luke recorded their question in **Acts 1:6**:

> *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"*

Their question shows that they were still carrying expectations shaped by the natural nation of Israel and the visible order they had known. They did not yet see clearly how completely Jesus Christ would fulfil the former covenant shadows and establish the spiritual reality of the New Covenant. This is important when reading Matthew 24 because the disciples' assumptions do not determine the meaning of Jesus' answer.

Jesus could speak to men who were still thinking naturally while giving them truth that required spiritual understanding. His teaching must therefore be understood according to the words He spoke rather than according to expectations the disciples had not yet fully left behind. Jesus had already taught that His words must be received spiritually.

Jesus said in **John 6:63**:

> *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."*

We must therefore allow Jesus' words to interpret the events rather than force His teaching into the disciples' remaining natural expectations. The destruction of the Temple, the end of the age, His coming and the Kingdom must all be understood in the light of the spiritual reality being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The disciples would come to understand these things more fully after Pentecost, when Jesus Christ came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people and the New Covenant reality became their experience.

They Were Living at the Close of an Age

Jesus and His disciples had lived under the former covenant order. The Temple still stood in Jerusalem, the priesthood still functioned, sacrifices continued to be offered, and the ceremonies of the Law remained visible throughout Jewish religious life. Yet Jesus Christ was the fulfilment towards which those things had pointed.

The Law Was a Schoolmaster to Bring Them to Christ

Paul explains the purpose of the Law by describing it as a schoolmaster whose work was to bring people to Jesus Christ. The Law was never intended to be the final destination of God's people. Its purpose was to prepare them for the reality that would come in Christ.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:24-25**:

> *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

The former covenant age was therefore not intended to continue indefinitely. The Law, its ceremonies, sacrifices and shadows had an appointed purpose because they prepared the people for the fulfilment that would come in Jesus Christ. Once that fulfilment came, God's people were not to remain under the schoolmaster.

The schoolmaster was not the destination. Jesus Christ was the One to whom the Law pointed, and the movement was from the shadow to the reality. God's people were being brought from the former covenant order into the New Covenant life found in Jesus Christ.

The End of the Former Covenant Age

This helps us understand what the disciples were asking when they spoke of *"the end of the AION."* They were living at the close of the age in which the Law had served as the schoolmaster. Jesus Christ, the One to whom that age had pointed, was standing before them and bringing its purpose to fulfilment.

The end of the age therefore did not mean the destruction of the physical universe. It concerned the conclusion of the former covenant age and the coming of the New Covenant reality in Jesus Christ. The schoolmaster had served its appointed purpose, and the reality had come in Christ.

Paul later wrote in **Galatians 4:4-5**:

> *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."*

Jesus came *"under the law,"* but He came to accomplish redemption and bring His people into the New Covenant reality. His death and resurrection would complete the redemptive work, and His coming as the Holy Spirit would bring His people into the life of the New Covenant. The disciples' question concerning the end of the age therefore cannot be separated from their question concerning His coming.

The age in which they had lived was reaching its appointed conclusion. The reality to which the former covenant had pointed was being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Their questions must therefore be understood within that first-century covenant change.

His Coming Was Not Thousands of Years Away

Jesus had promised that He would come to His own disciples. His promise was spoken directly to those who were then listening to Him. He prepared them to expect His coming rather than directing the promise towards people living thousands of years later.

Jesus said in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

He also told them that the Spirit who was with them would be in them.

Jesus said in **John 14:17**:

> *"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."*

Jesus was not preparing those disciples for a promise that would remain unfulfilled throughout their lifetime. Before His departure from their visible presence, He told them that the Holy Ghost would come *"not many days hence."* The promise was moving rapidly towards fulfilment.

Luke wrote in **Acts 1:4-5**:

> *"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

On the Day of Pentecost, that promise was fulfilled. Jesus Christ came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people, the Gospel Day began, and the New Covenant reality became the present experience of those who were born again. Matthew 24 therefore cannot be used to move His coming thousands of years beyond the disciples to whom He had promised, *"I will come to you."*

What Was the Sign of His Coming?

The disciples had specifically asked Jesus, *"what shall be the sign of thy coming?"* Having established that His promised coming was fulfilled at Pentecost, we can now identify the great New Covenant evidence that He had come. The answer is found in the continuing reality of Jesus Christ dwelling within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:26-27**:

> *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

Paul identifies the revealed mystery with the words *"Christ in you."* This is the great New Covenant reality. What had been hidden from ages and generations was now made manifest to the saints through Jesus Christ dwelling within His people.

Jesus had promised His disciples that He would come to them. He had told them that the Spirit who was with them *"shall be in you,"* and He had said plainly, *"I will come to you."* His promised coming would therefore establish an inward relationship in which Jesus Christ Himself would dwell within His people.

Paul describes that fulfilled reality as *"Christ in you."* The promise and the fulfilment agree. Jesus Christ came at Pentecost as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people, and from that day the indwelling Christ became the continuing New Covenant reality of every person who is born again.

The great evidence of His fulfilled coming is therefore not something believers must continue waiting to see in the natural sky. It is the present New Covenant reality of Jesus Christ dwelling within His people by His Spirit. The great evidence is the indwelling Christ.

Pentecost and A.D. 70 Belong to the Same Covenant Change

We must distinguish between the beginning of the New Covenant reality and the later destruction of Jerusalem. At Pentecost in A.D. 31, Jesus Christ fulfilled His promised coming, His people received the indwelling Spirit, and the Gospel Day began. The New Covenant reality had come even though the physical Temple continued to stand.

During the following years, the Jewish religious order continued visibly. Many people were still being confronted with the choice between remaining attached to the former shadows and receiving their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. God permitted this period of transition until the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.

These were distinct events within the same first-century covenant change. Pentecost brought the New Covenant reality, the transition continued, and A.D. 70 brought the visible Temple-centred former order to its historical end. Jesus could therefore speak in one continuing setting about His coming, the end of the age and the destruction connected with Jerusalem without requiring every event to occur on the same day.

The Questions Must Remain Within Jesus' Timeframe

Most importantly, Jesus did not allow His disciples to place the answers outside their generation. Before leaving the Temple He had already identified the generation upon whom the judgement would come. Later in Matthew 24 He repeated that same timeframe.

Jesus had said in **Matthew 23:36**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

He later said in **Matthew 24:34**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*

Those statements control the timeframe of the teaching. Whatever signs Jesus gave concerning the events before them had to occur within *"this generation."* Whatever prophetic language He used concerning His coming, and whatever He meant by the end of the age, had to remain within the same generation He had identified.

We cannot accept Jesus' timeframe for the Temple and then move His coming and the end of the age into another generation thousands of years later. The disciples had asked their questions within a first-century setting, and Jesus answered them within the timeframe He had already established.

His first warning was not to calculate dates or search the natural sky. He began by warning His disciples against deception with the words: *"Take heed that no man deceive you."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does AION refer to the end of an age in this setting?

Personal Reflection

Has the end of the Old Covenant age been confused in your thinking with the end of the physical world?

Action Step

Identify one belief that needs clarification and explain how recognising Christ's coming at Pentecost changes the way you trust His present presence.

TAKE HEED THAT NO MAN DECEIVE YOU

BACK TO CONTENTS

Having heard the disciples' questions, Jesus began His answer with a warning. Before speaking further about the events that would unfold, He told those sitting before Him to guard themselves against deception. This opening instruction helps us identify both the audience He was addressing and the circumstances His disciples would face.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:4-8**:

> *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye 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 divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."*

Notice the direct language Jesus used. He said *"Take heed that no man deceive you"* and *"ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars."* Jesus was speaking to His disciples about conditions they would encounter. These signs were not given so that believers thousands of years later could watch world events and repeatedly announce that His coming must now be near.

"The End Is Not Yet"

Jesus specifically warned the disciples not to treat every disturbance as the final event. He told them *"see that ye be not troubled"* and then added, *"all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."* Wars, political upheaval, famine, disease and earthquakes were therefore not themselves the end. They belonged among the conditions that would occur before the conclusion Jesus had foretold.

This also gives a continuing principle to believers throughout the Gospel Day. God's people should not allow frightening events to control their faith or cause them to interpret Scripture through fear. Jesus told His disciples not to be troubled, and that instruction continues to teach us how to respond to disturbing events.

The continuing principle, however, must not be used to change the original audience. Jesus was first preparing those disciples for circumstances they would face within their own generation. The events He described must therefore remain within the timeframe He established.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why did Jesus warn against deception before describing the approaching events?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes pass on disturbing news before checking whether it is true or whether it uses the Bible correctly?

Action Step

Choose a recent claim or headline. Explain how you will examine it carefully and change what you repeat, remembering Jesus' warning against deception.

"Then Shall They Deliver You Up"

Jesus then moved from general disturbances to events that would affect His followers personally. He warned the disciples that persecution, betrayal and hatred would accompany the spread of the Gospel. His words again show that He was addressing people who would experience the events He described.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 24:9-13**:

> *"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."*

Jesus said *"they deliver you up," "shall kill you,"* and *"ye shall be hated."* These words were spoken to people who would soon begin preaching Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Judaea and beyond. The book of Acts records the very kinds of persecution Jesus had warned them to expect.

After the healing of the man at the Temple, Peter and John were arrested because they preached Jesus and the resurrection. Stephen was later killed, the Church experienced great persecution, and believers were scattered from Jerusalem. Opposition followed the Gospel as it spread into other regions.

Luke wrote in **Acts 8:1**:

> *"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."*

The events recorded in Acts fit the warning Jesus had given His disciples. Persecution was not waiting for a distant generation but was already being experienced by the Church in Jerusalem and throughout the surrounding regions. The disciples themselves entered the circumstances Jesus had foretold.

False Teachers Would Also Arise

Jesus also warned that *"many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."* The danger was not limited to outward persecution because deception would also arise among those who

claimed to speak concerning spiritual things. The apostles later repeated similar warnings to believers living during that first-century period.

Paul said in **Acts 20:29-30**:

> *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."*

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that grievous wolves would enter among them and that men would arise from among themselves speaking perverse things. The warning of Matthew 24 was therefore being repeated to people living within the same first-century setting. The danger of deception was real and immediate.

The continuing principle remains important for God's people throughout the Gospel Day. Believers must test teaching by Scripture and refuse deception wherever it appears. The existence of false teachers today, however, does not move Jesus' first-century prophecy into our generation.

The Gospel Would Be Preached Before the End

Jesus then gave another important marker concerning the period before the end. The Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached widely among the nations before the conclusion He had foretold. This preaching belonged within the same sequence of events He was describing to His disciples.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:14**:

> *"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."*

The word translated *"world"* here is OIKOUMENE. It refers to the inhabited world and was commonly used for the known world under Roman rule. It is not the same word as AION, translated *"world"* in **Matthew 24:3**, nor is it KOSMOS.

Luke uses the same word when describing the decree of Caesar Augustus.

Luke wrote in **Luke 2:1**:

> *"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed."*

Caesar did not tax every person on the entire planet. The expression concerned the inhabited world under Roman authority. This use of OIKOUMENE helps us understand the language Jesus used when He said that the Gospel would be preached *"in all the world."*

By the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, he could speak of the Gospel as having spread widely throughout the world known to them. The apostolic message had moved far beyond Jerusalem and Judaea and was being proclaimed among the nations. This widespread witness belonged to the first-century expansion of the Gospel.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:23**:

> *"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;"*

Scripture Records the Fulfilment

Paul's words provide direct biblical evidence that the Gospel proclamation Jesus foretold was fulfilled within that first-century generation. He did not speak of the Gospel as though its worldwide witness were still waiting for a distant future. He said that it *"was preached to every creature which is under heaven."*

Paul gives another confirmation at the conclusion of Romans.

Paul wrote in **Romans 16:25-26**:

> *"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:"*

Paul said that the Gospel had been *"made known to all nations."* His words show that the Gospel witness was already going forth among the nations during that first-century generation. This agrees directly with the condition Jesus had given in **Matthew 24:14**: the Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached *"in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."*

Luke gives another indication of the breadth already represented at the beginning of the Gospel Day.

Luke wrote in **Acts 2:5**:

> *"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven."*

Scripture therefore gives its own testimony concerning the spread of the Gospel. It went forth throughout the inhabited world, was made known among the nations and fulfilled the condition Jesus had given before the end of that age. The apostolic record shows that the Gospel witness Jesus foretold was not waiting for another generation.

Matthew 24:14 therefore does not require a future worldwide preaching campaign before a future physical return of Jesus Christ. Its fulfilment belonged within the generation Jesus identified. The Gospel itself continues throughout the Gospel Day, but the prophetic condition Jesus gave in Matthew 24 was fulfilled within that first-century timeframe.

These Signs Belonged Before the End

Jesus therefore gave His disciples a sequence they could understand. There would be deception, wars and disturbances, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. His followers would suffer persecution, false prophets would arise, and the Gospel would spread widely among the nations before the end came.

These events belong within the timeframe Jesus later confirmed when He said, *"This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."* We do not need to force every modern war, earthquake, disease or political disturbance into Matthew 24. Jesus gave these warnings to disciples who would live through the period He was describing.

The continuing principles remain valuable to God's people. We must reject deception, refuse fear, remain faithful under pressure and continue to proclaim the Gospel. Those principles continue throughout the Gospel Day, while the prophecy itself remains with the people and generation to whom Jesus gave it.

Jesus would next speak even more specifically about the approaching events. He would mention Judaea, direct people to flee into the mountains, and describe a period of extraordinary distress. He called that period *"great tribulation."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Acts and the Epistles show the warnings and Gospel proclamation unfolding?

Personal Reflection

Under pressure, are you tempted to become impatient, withdraw your love or stop speaking faithfully about Christ?

Action Step

Identify one relationship affected by pressure. Explain how you will allow the love of Christ within to govern a specific response instead of yielding to resentment.

THEN SHALL BE GREAT TRIBULATION

BACK TO CONTENTS

Jesus had warned His disciples about deception, persecution, false prophets and the disturbances that would occur before the end. He then became even more specific. His words identified a geographical location, gave practical instructions to people living there and described a period of exceptional distress connected directly with the desolation He had already pronounced upon Jerusalem.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:15-22**:

> *"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not 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."*

The setting is local and historical. Jesus spoke of people in Judaea, of fleeing into the mountains, of people standing on housetops and working in fields, and of circumstances that

would make sudden flight especially difficult. He was warning people living in and around Jerusalem about a judgement that would come upon the land within the generation He had already identified.

Jesus was not describing believers throughout the whole earth suddenly escaping from a future worldwide catastrophe. His instructions concerned people who could recognise an approaching danger and take practical action to escape it. The location, circumstances and timeframe all belong together.

"When Ye Therefore Shall See"

Once again Jesus spoke directly to His disciples when He said, *"When ye therefore shall see."* The words assume that those hearing Him would be able to recognise the approaching danger. Jesus was giving them information that could be understood and acted upon when the events began to unfold.

This agrees with the principle we have followed throughout the Study Guide. We must first ask, To whom was Jesus speaking? His warning was given to people then living, and the events belonged within the timeframe He had already established.

The disciples were not being told to watch for signs that would appear thousands of years after their deaths. Jesus was preparing them for events connected with Jerusalem and Judaea within their own generation. His words must therefore remain with the audience to whom they were first spoken.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Jesus' directions concerning Judaea identify the setting of the great tribulation?

Personal Reflection

What makes you delay responding when the command of Jesus is clear?

Action Step

Identify one instruction from the Bible you have postponed following. Explain the change you will make in obedience because you trust His Word.

Luke Identifies the Approaching Desolation

Matthew records Jesus speaking of *"the abomination of desolation."* Luke's parallel account helps us understand what the disciples were to recognise when the desolation approached. His account names the city, the surrounding region and the people upon whom the distress would come.

Jesus said in **Luke 21:20-24**:

> *"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."*

Luke identifies the city as Jerusalem and tells the disciples what they would see: *"Jerusalem compassed with armies."* He identifies Judaea as the surrounding geographical area and speaks of *"great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people."* These details provide a clear Scriptural explanation of the setting.

The great tribulation was connected with the judgement upon Jerusalem that Jesus had already announced. The city, the land, the armies and the people all belong to the same historical setting. Jesus' warning was directed towards events that would unfold within the generation He had identified.

Historical Confirmation From Josephus

The terrible conditions that developed during the siege of Jerusalem are also recorded by the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Josephus had personally witnessed events connected with the Jewish war against Rome and later recorded the siege and destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman commander Titus. His account describes the severity of the suffering within the city as the siege continued.

Josephus records an extreme famine in Jerusalem. Food became so scarce that people searched desperately for anything that could be eaten, while hunger and death spread throughout the city. He describes houses filled with people who had died from starvation and records how the suffering became increasingly severe as the siege continued.

Josephus also records a particularly horrifying incident involving a woman named Mary. Driven to desperation by the famine, she killed her nursing son, roasted him and ate part of him. When others discovered what had occurred, even those already surrounded by the horrors of the siege were shocked by what the famine had driven her to do. (Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book VI, Chapter 3, Section 4; William Whiston translation.)

This historical testimony confirms the extraordinary severity of the distress Jesus had foretold. Jesus had warned of *"great tribulation"* and *"great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people."* The siege of Jerusalem brought terrible suffering upon the city and people Jesus had identified within the generation He addressed.

Josephus does not establish the meaning of the prophecy because Scripture has already established the audience, setting and timeframe. His historical record provides confirmation that the severe judgement Jesus foretold came upon Jerusalem within that generation. The

history therefore stands as supporting testimony to the fulfilment already established from Scripture.

The Warning Was Practical

Jesus gave practical instructions to people who would need to escape approaching earthly judgement. Those in Judaea were to flee into the mountains, while the person on the housetop was not to delay by returning inside to gather possessions. The person in the field was not to turn back for clothing because the need to flee would be urgent.

Jesus also recognised circumstances that would make sudden flight especially difficult. Pregnancy and caring for infants would make escape harder, while winter conditions could hinder travel. The Sabbath could also create difficulties within a Jewish environment where movement and public activity were restricted by established religious practice.

These instructions describe people physically leaving a threatened area when the signs Jesus had given became visible. They do not describe a supernatural removal of believers from the planet. Jesus was telling His hearers how to respond when the approaching judgement upon Jerusalem could be recognised.

"These Be the Days of Vengeance"

Luke gives another important statement when Jesus says, *"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."* The judgement upon Jerusalem was therefore not an accidental event of history. Jesus had already foretold it as the culmination of the judgement He pronounced in Matthew 23.

There He had said, *"All these things shall come upon this generation."* Now He spoke of *"the days of vengeance."* The generation that had rejected God's messengers and rejected Jesus Christ would experience the judgement He had foretold.

These statements belong within the same continuing teaching. Matthew 23 identifies the generation, while Luke's account identifies Jerusalem and the days of vengeance. The historical judgement described in these verses is therefore tied directly to the people and setting Jesus had already named.

The Great Tribulation Belonged to That Generation

Jesus described the coming distress as *"great tribulation."* Many modern teachings remove those words from their setting and place them into a future seven-year period after a supposed rapture of the Church. Jesus' own words, however, keep the tribulation within the setting He was describing to His disciples.

The people He addressed were told what they would see. The location was Jerusalem and Judaea, while the danger involved armies, flight and the destruction of the city. The timeframe had already been established as *"this generation."*

The great tribulation therefore belongs within the generation Jesus identified. It cannot be removed from that audience, geography and timeframe and then placed into another generation thousands of years later. The prophecy must remain within the setting Jesus Himself gave it.

The Elect Were Not Abandoned

Jesus also said, *"but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."* God knew His people during the coming judgement, and the destruction of Jerusalem did not mean that He had forgotten those who belonged to Him. His warning itself showed His care by preparing His people to recognise the danger and respond to His words.

The Gospel had already gone forth, and people were being brought into Jesus Christ. The true place of safety was no longer found in attachment to the Temple or confidence in the former covenant order. Salvation was in Jesus Christ, and His people were to listen to His words rather than place confidence in outward religious structures.

This also gives a continuing principle to believers throughout the Gospel Day. God's people must listen when He speaks, trust His Word and obey the truth He reveals. Religious buildings, traditions and inherited practices cannot take the place of Jesus Christ.

False Christs Would Continue to Deceive

Jesus continued His warning by preparing His disciples for false claims concerning Christ. As the period of distress approached, they were not to be persuaded by reports that Christ could be found in some physical location. Jesus told them beforehand so that they would not be deceived.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:23-28**:

> *"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."*

Jesus said, *"Behold, I have told you before."* He was preparing those disciples beforehand so that they would not be deceived as the events unfolded. They were not to follow rumours claiming that Christ had appeared physically in the desert or in secret chambers.

This agrees with what Jesus later explained plainly in John 14. His promised coming would not restore the former outward relationship of Jesus standing physically beside His people. He would come as the Holy Spirit to dwell within them.

Prophecy Fulfilled, Principle Remaining

The great tribulation belongs within the first-century judgement upon Jerusalem. Jesus was speaking to His disciples about events connected with Judaea, Jerusalem, approaching armies and the generation He had already identified. The prophecy must therefore remain within that historical setting.

The continuing principles still instruct believers throughout the Gospel Day. We must refuse deception, listen carefully to the words of Jesus, place our confidence in Christ rather than

religious institutions, and obey the truth God has revealed. Those lessons remain even though the historical prophecy itself belonged to that first-century generation.

Jesus now moved from the historical distress surrounding Jerusalem into prophetic language describing what followed. His next words begin: *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Luke's account connect the great tribulation with Jerusalem's desolation?

Personal Reflection

Do you seek reassurance from religious personalities or special locations instead of the Jesus Christ who dwells within His people?

Action Step

Identify one misleading claim you need to reject. Explain how you will answer it from the Bible and place your confidence in Christ Himself.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS

BACK TO CONTENTS

After describing the great tribulation connected with Jerusalem, Jesus continued with prophetic language concerning the sun, moon, stars and heavens. These words must remain within the same audience, setting and timeframe already established throughout Matthew 23 and 24. Jesus did not suddenly move thousands of years beyond the generation to whom He was speaking.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:29**:

> *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:"*

The opening words are especially important: *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days."* Jesus had just spoken about the tribulation associated with Jerusalem and Judaea. What He described next followed that tribulation and therefore belonged within the same first-century setting.

Prophetic Language Must Be Interpreted by Scripture

The language of the sun being darkened, the moon failing to give light and stars falling from heaven was not new. The prophets had already used similar language when describing divine judgement upon nations and established powers. We must therefore allow Scripture to explain how this prophetic language was already being used.

Isaiah wrote concerning Babylon in **Isaiah 13:9-10**:

> *"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine."*

Isaiah used this prophetic language while describing the judgement of Babylon. Its fulfilment did not require the literal sun to cease shining, the physical moon to disappear or natural stars to fall from the universe. The language communicated the overthrow of a nation under divine judgement.

Ezekiel used the same kind of language when describing judgement upon Egypt.

Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 32:7-8**:

> *"And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD."*

Again, the language communicates the overthrow of an established power under divine judgement. The sun, moon, stars and heavens form part of prophetic imagery used to describe enormous political and religious change. Scripture itself therefore shows us how this kind of language should be understood.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the words 'immediately after' be read with the tribulation just described?

Personal Reflection

Have dramatic predictions about the sun, moon or stars caused you to forget the spiritual meaning of prophetic imagery?

Action Step

Identify one interpretation to re-examine. Explain how you will use the Bible's own imagery and the setting in Matthew 24 before forming or repeating a conclusion.

Jesus Was Describing Judgement, Not the Destruction of the Universe

When Jesus used the same prophetic language in Matthew 24, He was speaking within a setting already concerned with Jerusalem, the Temple and the judgement of that generation. We should not change the meaning of familiar prophetic language simply because it appears in the words of Jesus. The audience, setting and timeframe must continue to govern the interpretation.

Jesus had already declared *"your house is left unto you desolate"* and foretold that *"there shall not be left here one stone upon another."* He had warned those in Judaea to flee and spoken of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies. He had also described the great tribulation that would accompany those events.

Jesus now used the language of darkened heavenly lights and shaken powers to describe the enormous judgement and change connected with the end of that former order. The imagery belongs naturally with the prophetic language already used by Isaiah and Ezekiel. The subject remains the judgement Jesus had been describing throughout the chapter.

The Falling Stars Represent a Fallen Ministry

The judgement upon Jerusalem provides the historical setting, but it does not make every symbol a description of the Temple's destruction. The falling stars represent ministers who once held to the truth and then fell away.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:20**:

> *"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."*

The stars represent the messengers of the churches. Their fall describes departure from spiritual truth, not physical stars falling from the sky. Paul warned of this danger in **Acts 20:29-30** when he told the elders that men would arise from among themselves, speaking perverse things and drawing disciples after them.

The heaven in this imagery is spiritual. It is the ecclesiastical heaven, meaning the spiritual realm associated with the Church, its ministry and the revelation of God's truth. Paul describes the heavenly position believers already have in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:6**:

> *"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

The destruction of the Temple and the falling away of ministers are therefore distinct matters. The Temple's destruction brought the remaining Temple-centred Old Covenant order to its historical end; the falling stars describe ministers departing from truth. Neither means that the physical universe was destroyed, that God lost His power, or that Jesus Christ first began dwelling within His people in A.D. 70.

The Powers of the Heavens Would Be Shaken

Jesus also said that *"the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."* Things that appeared secure, permanent and established were about to be brought down. The Temple stood at the centre of Jewish religious life, while its priesthood, sacrifices and ceremonies remained outwardly visible even after Jesus Christ had fulfilled the reality to which they pointed.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple therefore represented far more than the loss of buildings. It marked the visible historical removal of the former Temple-centred order. What had appeared fixed and permanent was being shaken and brought to its appointed conclusion.

The writer of Hebrews had already described that former covenant as passing away.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 8:13**:

> *"In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."*

Notice the words *"ready to vanish away."* The New Covenant had already been established, yet the former order remained visibly present during a period of transition. Its final visible removal came when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in A.D. 70.

The Timeframe Still Controls the Meaning

Whatever meaning is given to the prophetic imagery of **Matthew 24:29**, it must agree with the timeframe Jesus Himself gave. The sun being darkened, the moon not giving her light, the stars falling and the powers of the heavens being shaken are included within the events He was describing. Jesus later placed all of them within the same generation.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:34**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*

Jesus said that *"all these things"* would be fulfilled before that generation passed. The prophetic imagery of verse 29 must therefore remain within the same timeframe as the rest of the chapter. It cannot be removed from that generation and placed thousands of years into the future.

The prophecy was fulfilled within the generation Jesus addressed. His own timeframe controls the interpretation, just as it has throughout the teaching. The language may be highly prophetic, but the timeframe remains direct and definite.

The Principle Still Speaks to Us

Although the prophecy belonged to that generation, the spiritual principle remains important. Human religious structures may appear permanent, traditions may seem unchangeable and institutions may appear too established ever to fall. Yet nothing can resist the fulfilment of what God has declared simply because people have trusted in it for a long time.

Our confidence must therefore rest in Jesus Christ rather than in outward forms. The former covenant shadows served their appointed purpose, but the reality came in Christ. Once the reality had come, the outward order could not remain the centre of God's covenant purpose.

The shaking described by Jesus demonstrates that God brings His purpose to fulfilment. What He declares will come to pass, regardless of how permanent an established order may appear. The history of Jerusalem and the Temple shows the certainty of His words.

Christ's Coming and Jerusalem's Judgement Are Distinct

Jesus continued His prophecy by speaking of the sign of the Son of man in heaven and His coming in the clouds with power and great glory. These declarations belong within the same historical setting, prophetic language and timeframe established throughout His teaching. The words of Jesus Christ must remain the foundation for understanding the fulfilment of everything He foretold.

There is a distinction between Christ's coming at Pentecost and His continuing coming to those who are born again throughout the Gospel Day. Jesus Christ came as Spirit in A.D. 31, and He continues to make His abode in those who hear the Gospel, believe and are born again. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 was a separate judgement upon the former outward order. It neither began Christ's indwelling presence nor ended His coming to dwell within those who receive Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Bible explain the symbolic language of the sun, moon and stars?

Personal Reflection

Does your loyalty to a leader or religious organisation sometimes make it difficult to recognise when biblical teaching has been obscured?

Action Step

Identify one claim that needs to be tested. Explain how you will respond when the words of Jesus conflict with that claim, keeping Pentecost and A.D. 70 distinct.

CONCLUSION: THE GENERATION JESUS IDENTIFIED

BACK TO CONTENTS

The prophecy of Jesus Christ must be understood within the audience, historical setting and timeframe He Himself established. Matthew 23 and 24 form one continuing teaching in which Jesus announced judgement upon Jerusalem, foretold the destruction of the Temple and answered the questions of His disciples. His words were directed towards people then living, and the events He described belonged within the generation He identified.

Before departing from the Temple, Jesus made the timeframe unmistakably clear.

Jesus declared in **Matthew 23:36**:

> *"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

The words *"this generation"* identify the people Jesus was addressing. He was not speaking about an unknown generation thousands of years later, but about those living during His earthly ministry. The judgement He announced upon Jerusalem belonged to their historical circumstances.

The Temple and the Disciples' Questions

Jesus then declared that their house would be left desolate and departed from the Temple. When His disciples drew His attention to its buildings, He foretold their complete destruction. Their questions on the Mount of Olives arose directly from these declarations, establishing the connection between Matthew 23 and the prophecy that followed.

Throughout His answer, Jesus continued speaking directly to those disciples. He warned them against deception, told them that they would hear of wars and rumours of wars, and declared that His followers would experience persecution and opposition. He also foretold that the Gospel of the Kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the inhabited world before the end of that age.

These warnings were not given to establish a recurring timetable by which believers in every century should calculate another coming of Jesus Christ. They belonged to the first-century generation that heard Him. Nevertheless, the principles of discernment, endurance and faithfulness continue to instruct God's people throughout the Gospel Day.

Jesus also identified the geographical setting of the approaching great tribulation. His instructions concerned those in Judaea who would need to flee when Jerusalem's desolation

approached. Luke's account identifies Jerusalem surrounded by armies, confirming the historical setting of the judgement Jesus foretold.

The extraordinary suffering surrounding the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 fulfilled the warning concerning the great distress that would come upon the city and its people. The Temple that had stood at the centre of the former covenant religious order was destroyed. Its destruction brought that visible Temple-centred order to its historical end.

Yet the New Covenant did not begin with Jerusalem's destruction. Jesus Christ had already completed His redemptive work, risen from the dead and fulfilled His promised coming at Pentecost in A.D. 31. He came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people, bringing the reality to which the former covenant shadows had pointed.

Jesus promised in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. Jesus Christ did not remain absent from His people while they waited for another physical coming. He came as the Holy Spirit, and His indwelling life became the present reality of everyone who is born again.

The prophetic language concerning the sun being darkened, the moon failing to give light and the stars falling from heaven must also remain within the historical setting Jesus established. Isaiah and Ezekiel had already used similar imagery when describing divine judgement upon nations and established powers. Jesus used this familiar prophetic language to describe the great judgement and change connected with the removal of Jerusalem's former Temple-centred order.

This prophetic shaking did not require the destruction of the physical universe. It described the overthrow of what had appeared secure and permanent, while the New Covenant reality established through Jesus Christ remained. The former covenant shadows had fulfilled their appointed purpose, and the enduring reality was found in the indwelling Christ.

The fulfilment of these declarations demonstrates the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and the certainty of His Word. His prophecy was not an uncertain forecast, nor did its historical fulfilment depend upon events thousands of years beyond the lives of those to whom He spoke. What He declared came to pass within the timeframe He established.

The Continuing Call to Faithfulness

For believers today, the continuing lesson is to place our confidence in Jesus Christ rather than in outward religious structures, human traditions or interpretations that disregard His own words. We are called to hear His truth, refuse deception and remain faithful through the life He now lives within us. Our security and spiritual life are found in the Person who has fulfilled His promises.

Jesus Christ has come. The New Covenant has been established, His Spirit dwells within His people, and His Word remains trustworthy. The judgement He declared concerning that generation came to pass within the generation He identified.

The generation was identified by Jesus Christ Himself, the events were fulfilled within the timeframe He established, and His words did not fail.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the audience, Temple setting and generation bring Jesus' prophecy together?

Personal Reflection

Which part of Jesus' first-century prophecy has most changed your trust in His words?

Action Step

Describe one attitude or practice that you will change when hearing new predictions. Explain how the established fulfilment strengthens your confidence in Jesus Christ.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why does 'this generation' matter when reading Matthew 23 and 24? Explain how the people Jesus addressed and His Temple prophecy establish the timeframe.

2. Understanding

How does the Greek word AION help explain the disciples' question about the end of the age? Distinguish what began at Pentecost from what happened to the Temple in A.D. 70.

3. Personal Reflection

Has understanding the Temple's destruction within the generation Jesus addressed corrected a fear or assumption about Matthew 24? Explain what changed in your confidence in Christ's words.

4. Response to Truth

What personal attitude or habit must change when dramatic prophetic predictions conflict with Jesus' audience and timeframe? Explain how you will respond in truth rather than fear.

5. Action Step

Identify one alarming claim about Matthew 24 that you have accepted or repeated. Which verses will you examine, and what will you change in the way you receive or pass on that claim? Explain when you will begin.

6. Early Response

Have you examined the claim identified in Question 5 and changed how you receive or repeat it? If yes, describe what you discovered and did. If not, explain the obstacle and your next response.

7. Ongoing Practice

How can keeping Jesus' audience, setting and timeframe in view help you respond to repeated predictions? Explain how His call to faithfulness can still guide you without treating new events as the fulfilment of that prophecy.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How does the Bible's use of the sun, moon and stars help explain the language after the great tribulation? Use a verse to explain the teaching about a fallen ministry and why this does not require the end of the physical universe.

9. Living the Truth

A person says that Christ first came to dwell within His people in A.D. 70. How would you use a verse to explain the difference between that judgement and Pentecost? Describe how you could answer respectfully.

10. Final Response

How do Jesus' words about the generation, the Temple and the great tribulation fit together? Explain what has become clearer to you and what this means for your continuing response to Him.